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ESSAYS IN FREEDOM

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ESSAYS IN FREEDOM

BY

HENRY W. NEVINSON



LONDON

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DEDICATION

TO HENRY W. MASSINGHAM

WHEN I asked if I might dedicate to you this collection of scenes and essays, you told me with characteristic impetuosity and disinterestedness to dedicate them to the devil. And I confess the suggestion pleased me, for there is something very attractive—something, if I may say so, like yourself—in a spirit that rouses man from the unconditioned ease into which he so readily sinks, as the Lord says in the Prologue to “Faust.” But after some hesitation between the two, I return to my original purpose. For it is on you rather than on any other power that the responsibility for the volume rests.

I well remember the stormy March afternoon when I met you for the first time, in the rather unadventurous atmosphere of a Liberal club, which I had not visited before owing to my conservative tastes and revolutionary convictions. I was then helping to organise the “British Legion” in aid of the Greek people against the Sultan, and was on the point of going out with the Legion myself, because the action of Greece in defying the cautious selfishness of the Powers and sending a force to assist the Cretan rebels against Turkish despotism, appeared a fine and chivalrous thing. It still appears so to me, much as my opinion of the Greek government and the Turkish people has changed, and, like most fine and chivalrous things, it has in the end been entirely successful. You held the same

view ; in fact, the "Daily Chronicle," which under your editorship was the most courageous and perturbing influence in London, had so impressed this view upon the country that even the most daring members of Parliament hardly knew themselves in the boldness with which they attended meetings and signed manifestoes. Nevertheless, I was a little surprised when in the first half minute of our brief conversation you asked me to act as your correspondent in the coming war. As I had just learnt to sit a horse in the military manner and had successfully manœuvred a company of the Coldstream Guards in Westminster Hall, I accepted with confidence before the minute was over.

Next morning I started for the Thessalian frontier. It was St Patrick's Day, and so, under the auspices of yourself and an equally high-hearted saint, I entered upon the course which has led me by a rather variegated route to the present volume. It led me through the last of the picturesque wars, in which one could see the enemy quite plainly as long as one's face was turned his way. It led me over Mount Pindus to the rough heart of Epirus where I witnessed my first siege, shared the joy of victorious advance into the enemy's country, and learnt the infection of fear and the complete art of retirement. It led me to Crete, where I enjoyed the society of the international forces and the patriot rebels in turn, crossing from one to the other over the zone that was called neutral because both sides claimed an equal right of firing at anyone seen within it. It led me next summer to Spain, where I had the good fortune of witnessing the imperturbable courtesy with which the people maintained their interest in bull-fights amid the news of Philippine and Cuban disasters—the good fortune also of sailing a fishing-boat round the great battleship that the

Spaniards kept in Cadiz harbour, because it was so much too costly to waste on war; and of being imprisoned at Ceuta, to avoid stoning at the hands of patriotic convicts, because I wished to inform you from personal investigation whether it would be for our country's advantage to accept that African fortress and penal settlement in exchange for Gibraltar.

My next foreign experience in your service must have been at some police riots in county Mayo, where many fine and eloquent heads were broken. And then at the siege of Fort Chabrol in Paris, where I may claim to have influenced the course of French history by startling a hen so much that she flew over the fortress wall to the relief of the garrison. I often thought of that generous accident with pleasure when a few months later I was myself besieged but found no kindly hen flying over the Ladysmith defences to vary our diet of horse and water. Time eats all things, and in time came our entrance into Pretoria, but even then it was two years before I could range over the wasted lands, and see our soldiers with happy sentiment forgiving the men and women whose country they had desolated.

A year later I was in Macedonia, among peoples so devoid of civility that they displayed no happy sentiment or forgiveness at all, though the desolation was at least equal; and in the following autumn I was travelling slowly down the West coast of Africa. After going for a short distance up the Congo and watching the new forts being constructed to protect what virtue the capital of the Congo State can boast of, I landed in the slave-haunted territory of Angola and journeyed into the interior by the slave footpaths, along the forest watershed between the Congo and the Zambesi. On my return voyage I stayed in the

Portuguese islands of San Thomé and Príncipe in the Gulf of Guinea, where men and women are imported from the mainland to grow cocoa for us under a system of slavery too horrible even for satire.

Hardly had I cooled down from the Equator, when winter took me to St Petersburg during the brief joy of the general strike by which labour inaugurated freedom ; and then to Moscow, where I witnessed the gallant attempt to revive barricade revolutions, to the scenes of Jewish massacre in Kieff and Odessa, to Warsaw with its fortress executions, and to the Baltic Provinces, where a bloody assize raged, and the torture-chambers of Riga were in full action. The following May (1906) allowed me to see hope rise again for a moment upon Russia with the opening of the first Duma. In the next winter I was on the Caspian, where Tartars and Armenians were organising mutual slaughters, and then I looked into Persia from the foot of Ararat, and traversed the desolation of Georgian villages where the noble rebels of the Caucasus were cowering for refuge from the storms among the ruins of their homes. The next autumn and winter I spent chiefly with the leaders of the reform movements, both Hindu and Mohammedan, in the cities of India, and so was present at the Surat Congress when the violent rupture between the two main parties of Indian Nationalists marked a significant date in the history of the country. Thence I proceeded to Peshawur and the entrance to the Khyber Pass, where a punitive expedition was just starting for the benefit of the mountain tribes—a thing too frequent to mark any date at all.

So you see our chance meeting in a Liberal club nearly twelve years ago has brought me varied experiences by sea and land ; and in this very incomplete

summary of them I have not even mentioned all those spiritual adventures which we enjoy in Fleet Street and other parts of London—adventures so much more perilous than wars and deserts. This book is simply the result of external and spiritual experiences in a varied life, and that is why I said the responsibility for it must rest with you. If you protest that its brief chapters to nearly one-third are occupied with literature and are not concerned with experience at all, I must plead that I have never been scholar enough to separate literature from ordinary life. Like other people, I admire scholars and literary men, and I recognise the great importance of their work, just as I admire people who sit on Water-Boards or frame Licensing Bills, and recognise their importance. But I care only for the results of scholarship and literature in so far as they affect our usual existence ; just as, in regard to Water Boards and Licensing Bills, I care only for the water we are about to receive.

I am aware that I exaggerate the sphere of strict reality and downright experience in life, and I envy the people who live habitually on the higher planes of imagination or abstraction. For instance, I regret the grotesque difficulty I have sometimes felt in reading imaginary stories, in spite of my hearty admiration for them and their writers. If the stories are of unusual power, they may, it is true, act as a bewildering revelation, or for months together they may so discolour and distort one's view of things as to be almost blinding. But if they have not a direct bearing on the existence I know, they are likely to seem irrelevant, as Hilda Wangel said of all reading. And if I am told they ought to interest me because they are "so lifelike," I can but remember the reply of the Spartan king when he was invited to hear a

DEDICATION

boy whistle for all the world like a nightingale. "I have heard the nightingale itself," he said.

And I fear it is the same with abstractions. After the persistent efforts of many years, largely spent upon German and English philosophers and theologians, I was forced to the conclusion that these things were as far beyond my reach as the temple of fame or the Rose of Paradise. To take an instance again; some time ago I heard the old Duke of Argyll (who was perhaps the most distinguished President that the Loch Fyne Philosophic Society has ever known), discoursing to East End students on the necessity of cultivating abstract ideas. For some months, following his advice, we did our very best to cultivate them, and a few of us succeeded in raising almost everything to an abstract idea, including the Duke. But from first to last I utterly failed. From the Duke in the flesh I could rise to no abstract idea of thought or thinker, statesman or statesmanship, nobility or noble. I could not even conceive an abstract President of the above Society. To me the Duke remained a little old man with silky hair, an aggressive nose, and a portentous vehemence in uttering platitudes more startling than we expect from Dukes.

In politics I am haunted by a similar disillusioning weakness. On the one side, for example, I am filled with a wondering admiration for all Socialists and advocates of working people. Because they devote themselves without reservation to the cause of the poor, I confidently hope they will do something for the country to which you and I are devoted, since the country mainly consists of the poor. But I find it impossible to attach myself to Fabians or Social Democrats or any other of their parties, because they

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move like fixed stars in planes of abstract law far above my head, and I cannot keep up with their discourses upon the Proletariat and Economic Environment, when my mind is entirely occupied with visions of people I know in Shadwell getting up before daylight from crowded beds, living on disgusting bits of food, or imploring "governors" in vain to be allowed to work. On the other hand, in spite of a wondering envy, I am equally incapable of understanding the happier and more tasteful people who dwell with confident solemnity upon the idealistic abstractions of the Constitution, Rights of Property, and Law-and-Order, where I can perceive nothing but some amiable fellow-sinner endowed with a crown, a wig, a purse, a truncheon, or some dirt.

So, I fear, it may also be with that dear abstraction called Freedom, whose holy name I have inscribed on my title-page. I know Goethe's saying that there breathes so sweet a sound in the word Freedom that we could not do without it even if it always implied error. I know rebellion's universal anthem of "Liberté, Liberté chérie!" But I can form no vivid conception of Freedom apart from what I have seen. To me the word conveys nothing as a Natural Right, nothing as an abstract idea, and nothing as a symbolic woman with wings blowing a trumpet into the ears of marble captives, decoratively asleep in chains. I have learnt the reality of the thing only from the misery of its opposite, and when I hear the word Freedom I see shaggy farmers, rough with mud and storm, clad in leather cut from outstarved horses, waiting at the bottom of a watercourse, rifle in hand. Or I see a woman in rags cowering under a ruined wall while sleet hisses upon the charred and open patch of ground which was her home. Or I see a pale man

and girl hurried over the snow between brown-coated soldiers with fixed bayonets to be hacked to pieces in a barrack yard. 'Or I see a herd of black Africans, men and women, huddled together upon a steamer's deck, gazing like driven cattle towards the misty islands where they will toil until they die, in order that our chocolate creams may be cheap. Or I see a white-robed crowd gathered upon a beach where the surf beats heavily under a stormy moon, and from the crowd goes up a cry in honour of a prisoner spirited away from his country, untried and uncharged, for the cause of freedom. Or I see a great city whispering in terror at a decrepit and terrified old man who sits above the city like a spider in a web sensitive with treachery.

It would take too long to tell you all the hideous examples of slavery, despotism, and injustice I have seen. It is only as a camp-follower on the battlefield of freedom that I have learnt what freedom means. But the battlefield is large. It has as many scenes of conflict as Christ's Father's house has abiding places. For freedom, we know, is a thing that we have to conquer afresh for ourselves every day, like love; and we are always losing freedom, just as we are always losing love, because after each victory we think we can now settle down and enjoy it without further risk or struggle. If we would keep love or freedom we can never settle down. For consider how many and various are the hosts of freedom's enemies. In Central Africa I once spent a very interesting evening with a slave-raider and a government agent, who had just concluded a lucrative bargain in men and women for the cocoa plantations, and now beguiled the comfortable, after-dinner hours in singing to zithers alternate and impromptu verses, with the charming

THE BATTLES OF FREEDOM xvii

and innocent rivalry of Thyrsis and Melibæus. They came under the same great class among the enemies of freedom as professional torturers, executioners, Tsars who hang an average of a man a meal, and Imperialists who for prestige and markets devastate, deport, imprison, and flog. I mean the great class of people who are engaged in stifling freedom as a means of livelihood, and take their reward in cash down and the joys of home. But equal sources of danger, and more insidious, are the innumerable enemies who work against freedom like white ants in the dark—the bloodthirsty scandal-mongers, the devotees of authority, the cowards of habit, the freezing-points of virtue, the philanthropic bloodhounds who track past error. All these hosts of enemies are continually encroaching upon us, continually striving to limit our thoughts and actions, continually threatening us with their interference, their espionage, and oppression. That is why the battle of freedom is never done and the field never quiet.

For how many years—it must be at least fifteen—from my place among the camp followers I have watched you upon that field, flashing and flickering in the van of the turmoil, smiting the foul swarms of the enemy, charging them full in front, hanging on their flanks, often defeated but always heartening your men with your confidence; sometimes overwhelmed, but always leaving the brutish victor with the uncomfortable sense that though the gods smiled on his cause there was one who did not smile. Indeed, if you give them time, the gods themselves have a shamefaced way of slinking round to your side and pretending they had never left it. Whether the battle has been for the poor, the prisoner, and the subjugated, or whether it has been for the just, the

pioneers of enlightenment, and rebels of glorious fame—wherever you found ranged against you the heavy battalions on whose side the Prince of Darkness always stands—the heavy battalions of wealth and Society, of authority and custom, of military force, or traditions of conquest—in all those years you have hardly fought for a single cause in which the victory is not already yours.

And now that, after a long interval, I have for the past two years been happily fighting in your service again, I gather up for you these few essays and glimpses of things, written down in a service that, as the Prayer Book excellently says, is perfect freedom. The half-dozen scenes and criticisms that have not appeared in the "Nation" under your editorship, were written, I hope, in the same free spirit that you always encourage in your men—the spirit of initiative and personality that wins the modern battle. At all events, in everything that is included here, I have tried to look at the subject with my own eyes, disregarding convention, unless I thought it good, and authority, unless I agreed with it. And so my hope is that the subjects, however various, may at least be connected by a certain sincerity of treatment. For, in the end, the right to sincerity is freedom's dearest gift.

H. W. N.

LONDON, *March 17, 1909.*

ESSAYS IN FREEDOM

I

THE DRAMA OF FREEDOM

AT Terry's, in the Strand, one Saturday afternoon in 1907, the Literary Theatre Society gave a performance of "The Persians" of Æschylus, and a full and cultivated audience came to witness it. Some famous scholars were there, some modern poets, and hardly anyone who had not heard something of Athens and the Persian invasion. Confined to a small and heavily-curtained stage the actors moved uneasily in gorgeous robes. The messenger fell so close to the great Queen-Mother's knees that she seized and shook him, as Cleopatra seizes her messenger. The Chorus of Councillors had no room for their rhythmic movement to and fro. In turn, instead of in unison, they took up the utterances of foreboding, and terror, and sorrow—in turn, and in prose. All was in English prose—good prose, but about as different as language could be from the mouth-filling, overwhelming, Æschylean line. Except for a few touches on a hidden harp, no music was heard, no chant or song. Though it is of great importance to the play that it should run without pause from start to finish, the curtain was dropped for a quarter of an hour in the middle, to allow opportunities for social intercourse. Yet the whole performance took only an hour and a half, and the audience issued into the March sunshine in ample time for afternoon tea.

2 THE DRAMA OF FREEDOM

Never was the greatness of a poet more strangely vindicated. With everything against them—hampered by language, and prose, and space, and alien spectators—still the actors did not obliterate the eternal significance of that drama of freedom. We seemed to sit once more in the old wooden theatre beside the rock of the Acropolis, while overhead was the open sky of Greece. But two thousand three hundred and eighty years have passed since that first performance, when the sacred citadel was still littered with the burnt ruins of primeval temples which the invader had destroyed, and the jumble of the holy statues he had broken—blue bulls, and serpents, and fixedly-smiling goddesses with red hair—was barely surrounded for protection by hastily-constructed walls. On that day the event which the drama celebrates was only seven years old, and not a man in the audience but remembered the terror and glory of the time. Full in view across the sea stood the coasts to which the youngest spectators there had been hurried with their mothers when the incomprehensible barbarians swarmed into their homes. Just to the westward rose holy Salamis, where those who were fortunate to be of ripe age accomplished the great deliverance. In the strait itself lay the little rock on whose shore the shepherd Pan delighted to dance, and there they had slaughtered the proudest-born of all that devouring host like sheep.

On a cliff beyond the new harbour a king had set up a silver-footed throne. Around him scribes stood ready to record the most glorious deeds of the day. That king had enchained the seas, and bridged the channels, and flogged rebellious waves with thongs. In his service came the Kings of Tyre and of Sidon. Before him stood Queen Artemisia, wiser than kings.

At his feet a thousand ships were set in array, manned by the indomitable sailors of the world—men from Cyprus and rocky Cilicia, and from the shifting sandbanks of the Nile; and with them the sons of the Phœnicians, who had sailed round Africa, and, going westward, had seen the sun upon their right, and had returned through the Pillars from the dim stream of Ocean. Drawn up in masses on the shore stood ranks of Persians and Bactrians and Medes, an innumerable host, which drank rivers dry and ate up fertility like the locusts.

He who sat upon the silver-footed throne was the King of Kings, whose empire no man could measure. It reached the lake at the world's end, and the peaks where spearmen watch like eagles above the gulf of nothingness. It reached the cold homes where griffins brood over hoards of gold. It reached the streams of Indus, where ants bigger than foxes burrow in the golden sand. It reached the Cimmerian darkness, into which the king's father had chased back the blinking hordes that once had ventured out into the light of the sun. It reached the frozen steppes, where a hideous race bows down in worship before a sword, and drinks mare's milk from human skulls. Egypt was his, and all her mysterious wealth of immemorial wisdom. Nineveh was his, and Chaldæan Babylon, and all her astrologers and monthly prognosticators, her hundred gates of bronze, and terraced gardens hanging in air, her walls three hundred feet high, and her temple of Bel. Ecbatana was his, the Median city, built in seven concentric circles of gigantic walls, battlemented in seven distinct colours, so that it stands like a circular rainbow of white battlement, and of black, and of scarlet, and blue, and sardonyx, and silver, and gold. Susa was his, and into his

4 THE DRAMA OF FREEDOM

treasure-house all the wealth of Asia and of Lydian Cræsus had been poured. Thus, in the pride of uncounted possessions and unimaginable empire, the King of Kings sat upon his throne, and the whole audience well remembered the one poor ~~row~~ of Hellenic ships drawn up to confront his ineffable might as sole bulwark for the freedom of the world.

Æschylus himself was there, as he had been at Marathon before, and his younger brother, leading the charge of brazen prows, delivered the first crashing blow of victory. But, with ironic skill, instead of displaying before his Athenian audience the scene of triumph so familiar to them all, he afforded them that most pleasurable kind of sympathy, in which sorrow for the sufferer is mingled with personal exultation. He placed his drama in the royal palace at Susa, where Atossa was impatiently awaiting the news of her son's great triumph—Atossa, the self-same queen who, years before, had urged her husband, Darius, to the invasion of Greece, because she wanted to count among her handmaids the fair girls of Athens and Argos, of Sparta and Corinth. Now her triumph seemed assured, but still she was impatient and uneasy. Like the mother of Sisera, she looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Have they not sped? Have they not divided the prey?" Harassed by ill-omened dreams, she comes to consult the Persian Councillors, themselves dubious with foreboding. Through the long centuries we can feel the shiver of joy that passed over the intent Athenian audience on that first day, when she asked the casual question:—

"Where is that city, Athens, in the world?"

And, for answer, she was told:—

“ Far in the West, where sinks the worshipped sun ;
Slave to no man, and subject to no lord.”

Ill news comes fast ; with blow on blow tragic destiny strikes down the contemptuous pride of wealth and empire, such as the gods themselves blind with delusion. The messenger rushes in, telling of beaches where men gasped like stranded fish, of promontories strewn with unburied dead, of famished hosts, and of thousands drowned under melting ice. “ Who is not dead ? ” cries the queen in her despair. The ghost of her husband rises to foretell the destruction of the army left behind. Xerxes himself, her son, the King of Kings, enters at last a cowardly fugitive, longing only for death, his embroidered robes tattered and defiled, his shame so deep that not even a Chorus of Councillors can find a word of palliation or comfort. Together with him they pass from the stage, deploring in anguished lamentations the terrible things which Greeks, in the struggle for freedom, had brought upon the Persian name.

There is nothing like it in all literature. No poet has ever again won so enviable a reward as the shout that rose from the Athenian theatre when the messenger, describing Salamis to the queen, first spoke those lines :

“ Duly the right wing first advanced to fight,
And then their whole fleet came, and from the decks
One cry was heard, ‘ O sons of Hellas, rise !
Strike for the freedom of our land ! Oh ! strike
For our children’s freedom, and our wives and gods,
And our ancestral graves ! Now all’s at stake ! ’ ”

Phrynichus wrote a drama on the Persian wars, but it told of disaster, and the Athenians fined him, and forbade the play to be repeated. Shakespeare’s

6 THE DRAMA OF FREEDOM

"Henry the Fifth" was not contemporary, and its theme was not freedom's victory. That of all the dramatists then living, not one wrote a drama on the Armada, makes us doubt if the Armada ever really sailed. Of great poets, Byron comes nearest to Æschylus for personal service in the cause of freedom; but it was not his own country for which he fought. To the poet who, twelve years after "The Persians," was to produce in the "Agamemnon" the highest achievement of the human mind (as a great critic has rightly called it)—to him alone the supreme happiness had been reserved of sharing glory in the only noble kind of war, and of telling the history of its greatest battle in a drama enacted before his own comrades-in-arms.

II

THE POET OF FREEDOM

It was natural that Cambridge should, in 1908, celebrate the tercentenary of her greatest poet's birth by enacting his masque of "Comus." A masque never aimed at drama, and so, by its very limitations, it escaped failure in the hands of an undramatic poet, and could be represented for the beauty of its language and idea alone. No one looks for more, and since the only alternative for Cambridge actors wishing to perform some work of Milton's was the "Samson Agonistes," they could not hesitate when they had youth to act and a summer audience to please. For about the "Comus" there still hangs something of the youth whose childhood was spent while Shakespeare still shone upon the world—something of Apollo's lute, some memory even of heart-easing Mirth. Comus himself enters with the step of careless charm, and it is no savagely abhorred abomination greeting the star that bids the shepherds fold, telling of sounds and seas, with all their finny drove, of pert fairies and dapper elves, and calling for a light fantastic round. The poet had a long and bitter road to travel—a road unpleasing to youth and summer audiences—before he should tell of Samson "eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves, himself in bonds under Philistian yoke." It is no wonder Cambridge chose the "Comus" for her classic lawns and habitations dappled with sunshades.

Upon that long and bitter road no element of ironic tragedy was wanting. Except starvation, imprisonment, and execution, Milton escaped none of the miseries that can attend on noble minds. From boyhood it had been the aim of his existence to compose poetry in the manner of the great poets before him—"to leave," as he said in words that have become almost too familiar, "to leave something so written to after times, as they shall not willingly let it die." Rather, that was not merely the aim of his existence; it was the very soul of his nature, the essential demand that would allow him no peace, but hold him unsatisfied and tormented till it was fulfilled. And for its fulfilment he resolved upon and strictly practised a spiritual asceticism, a consecrated devotion that none of our poets has attempted to rival, except Wordsworth alone. Who has not admired that first manhood of unembittered austerity, that pleasant comeliness of body and mind, a vital learning beyond the dreams of pedants, a purity of soul still open to the country air and the wonder of night and morning? The poet might describe himself as beginning late, but before first manhood was over, his success was not merely assured; it was unsurpassed. Before he was thirty he had within his own province of poetry reached a height of accomplishment that no English poet had reached before or has since approached. Life and attainment smiled on him equally. His spirit was irradiated by all the innocent delights of sound and thought and vision; it was braced to the pursuit of a noble purpose, inexhaustible but already secure. "He who would not be frustrated of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem," he wrote in words only less well known than those others. And it seemed as if nothing could now

frustrate that hope, nothing prevent his life from remaining a true poem such as the poems he himself imagined, pervaded by dignified sweetness and a sunshine purity of light.

But the ironic spirit stood ready in ambush, and at the height of his poetic power, his happiness and distinction, he ceased to be a poet. Among arms, laws are not the only things that are silent. Milton, it is true, might have continued his poetic career without much external hindrance. There was nothing in his position to drag him unwillingly into the field of war and controversy. He seemed the natural associate of learned men like Selden, of cultured and reasonable men like Falkland and John Hales. One can imagine him taking part in the tolerant companionship at Broughton or Great Tew, when the moderate leaders of the constitutional party turned from their politics to the intellectual subjects that still delighted men of education.* One can imagine him lamenting the sorry tide of affairs that was diverting the ablest minds from the fine traditions of literature and wit handed down by the great Elizabethans. But from the fate of a fastidious man of letters impotent in a raging world of deeds he was saved by his own grandeur of disposition. He appears never to have hesitated as to his side or his action. For him there could be no party of cultured compromise, no moderate arrangement with the enemy, while freedom was at stake.

With an impetuosity all the more admirable because in his verse it is restrained to an intensity of power, he flung himself into the warfare that tore his country in half. Abandoning all for which he had hitherto lived—his learning, his art, that exercise of faculty in which alone a great man's happiness consists—not knowing whether he should survive to return to them again,

he grasped such weapon as came to his hand in vindication of a thing dearer to him, after all, than even his spiritual content or the splendour of fame that was his without question to command. Probably he did not actually recruit in the Parliamentary army, and that failure is one of the few errors which detract from his nobility. But with a whole-hearted sacrifice he gave up to freedom what was meant for art. Laying aside the sin that so easily besets the literary mind, he mingled without disdain in all the sweat and dust of envenomed and deadly controversies. Year after year the mind that had last composed the "Lycidas," and had already set its thoughts upon an epic to equal in renown blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides, now threw upon the world its turbulent and formless pamphlets, distorted by impatience, almost careless of expression, and, if such a thing might be, almost vulgarised by personality. Such faults do not count. They are the poet's glory. The peril of freedom called for any arms, and the strokes for her preservation must fall harsh and quick. Pamphlet after pamphlet leapt from his indignant soul; and whether the theme was religion or politics, or the Press or conscience or married life, each was a blow for personal and individual freedom.

But even in the din of all that conflicting fury the tragic irony kept her silent touch upon the pamphleteer. Milton had performed an act of devotion unequalled by any writer of genius till the pity of mankind's enslavement drove Tolstoy to perform the same. But, though a writer of genius, he made the writer's common mistake of exaggerating the power of words. He had not realised that men are not governed by reason, or even by passion, or even by interests, but by mental lethargy and habits, from

which nothing but opposing action can rouse them up. There is no proof that his pamphlets had the smallest effect on public affairs, or that his labours and eloquent indignation altered the course of his own times by a single jog. What was far worse, the party for which he had made so great a sacrifice was seldom worthy of his own ideal. What had Milton to do with "shallow Edwards and Scotch What-d'ye-call?" Where was liberty under "the new forcers of conscience," to whom new Presbyter was but old Priest writ large? With what enthusiasm could he maintain the high conflict for a Parliament that almost habitually displayed its dulness and lack of courage? It is a hard issue for a man of genius when the leaders of his party, to which there is no alternative but tyranny, begin to compromise and skulk. Attaching himself to no Church, and constant to no sect, Milton passed from one division of his party to another, belonging to all extreme sections in turn, except the insane, and testing each only by that one touchstone of freedom. At last, as is well known, he found freedom's refuge in nothing but Cromwell's absolutism—"our chief of men," who alone could check the pedantic bores of social tyrannies, and alone could vindicate for England her rightful place as the avenger of oppression and darkness throughout the world.

Hardly had that place been won, hardly had the poet identified himself to some extent with the greatness of Cromwell's rule, when the tragic irony touched him again. The Protector died, and with his last breath everything for which Milton had sacrificed his dearest powers crumpled up and dissolved. It was not a change of Government; it was the collapse of his own people. Honour, virtue, heroism, freedom herself—all were gone. They were shoved aside to be the

mock of lean and flashy songs, while all that was mean, corrupt, and paltry celebrated its triumph. Between the country he loved and the Powers of darkness and persecution secret "ententes" were arranged, and the flag that had stood for freedom throughout Europe was bartered for a harlot. There is no need to recount the shame of our country and the poet's woe.

" Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering."

Blind already for eight or nine years, reduced to poverty, experienced in one wife who refused him affection, in a second who died early, and in daughters who openly wished him dead, isolated among sons of Belial, his hopes shattered, his cause lost, his country prostituted to dishonour, he turned to fulfil the high promise of his bright and rigorous youth. He fulfilled it with a completeness that must have surpassed even the hopes of early manhood. And yet, even in that noblest monument of our language, the tragic irony has not let him go. Building for after ages, he built upon a truth which he supposed to be eternal, and now, after the passage of less than three centuries, no one believes it. That innocent garden, that lovely Eve, in whose presence all higher knowledge fell degraded, that prone archangel and the Tree of human fate—if Milton had chosen the Arthurian legend, which he rejected as being of dubious authority, he could not have built upon a vision more unsubstantial.

The last thing with which one would compare a politician's soul is a star. The last thing one would say of a pamphleteer's soul is that it dwells apart. Soiled with the dust and sweat of controversy, distracted by passing interests, encompassed by crowding humanity, torn by the daily rage, occupied with tactics, maligned

by evil tongues, clutching at compromises as triumphs, or engrossed in the infinitely little as practical concerns, how is a soul to be called a star? How can it dwell apart? It would seem as reasonable to call a scavenger the King of Kings, and to say he dwelt in a stately pleasure dome.

Milton's age was, above all others in our history, an age of politics and controversy. Every question that can be raised upon human society, from communism to clothing, from the form of government to the cut of hair, was disputed with a remorseless and blinding conviction that often left the disputant dead upon the field. There was no action of ordinary life, no convention of daily intercourse, and no theory of State upon which someone or other might not lose his reasonableness and "go Fantee" with the first weapon that came handy, whether it were the libel or the pike. To civil dudgeon in every form were added the theological hatreds which alone could surpass the virulence of party. Ideas of God and of His worship, that to most people remain so secret, remote, and evanescent in the heart, appeared as harshly definite, as fit a subject for apostolic blows and knocks as the religious teaching in our primary schools. The visionary distinctions of doctrine were deemed natural themes for decision by infallible artillery. It was hardly reasonable that a doubter on the form of Church government should be allowed to live. To question dogma implied an unspeakable depravity, and for theological abuse in the pamphlets of the day it has been truly said, "the gamut of charges always ranged from bad grammar to unnatural crime."

Into the thick of these controversies, where, as we have seen, the dust was most stifling and the shouting wildest, Milton plunged from the height of his intellect.

Regardless of fame already won, disdaining the art already carried to a perfection unsurpassed in English verse, for the twenty most productive years of a poet's life, he abandoned poetry. In crossing the centre of life's bridge, the man to whom poetry was the final cause of existence, produced an average of less than fourteen lines a year. He stood aloof from hardly any phase of the conflicts then raging. Wherever there was a blow to be struck for freedom of thought or speech or government, there he was found with the drawn sword of the spirit in his hand, ready for onslaught or defence—ready for anything except the meditative peace and leisure that a poet's life is thought to require. It did not matter what buffets he received, or with what filthy scorn he was bespattered. The abuse showered on him by the greatest Latinist of Europe would rank with the anonymous postcards of to-day :—

“A puppy,” cried his enemy, arguing in support of royal supremacy ; “once my pretty little man, now blear-eyed, or rather a blindling ; having never had any mental vision, he has now lost his bodily sight ; a silly coxcomb, fancying himself a beauty ; an unclean beast, with nothing more human about him than his guttering eyelids ; the fittest doom for him would be to hang him on the highest gallows, and set his head on the Tower of London.”

It did not matter that Milton's own share in the conflict was quite ineffectual, and that, but for his name, none of his pamphlets would now be remembered by any but antiquarians, or, at the most, only one. In the fight for freedom neither suffering nor success is counted. The fighting itself is all, and when the battle is hot, there is no time to criticise the blows, so long as they are hard. Where freedom was at stake, not even the object of his existence could hold

Milton back from the unpoetic turmoil. He failed at every point. His blows made next to no impression. His cause was finally overwhelmed in a ruin that left him too much despised for hanging. His failure is now seen to cast no shadow on the glory of his conflict ; but how must it have looked to him amid the wretchedness of retreat when the yelling of triumphant evil came hot upon the death scene of the cause for which he had given all ? How could Wordsworth say of such a man, " Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart ? "

As when the wrack of storm drifting round our little planet conceals the depths of the firmament, so the star of Milton's soul was hidden in the depths of personality during the years of political tempest. Remote and forgotten, it stood obscured, almost as if it had never shone. We can hardly say how far the poet himself was still conscious of its effulgence. The man who before his silence had reached in " Lycidas " the supreme mastery of English verse—did he realise the purest ray still flashing within him, and did he regret its long eclipse behind the earth's shadow ? The miracle is that when the tempest passed away, taking with it all the good of life but life itself, the star shone out upon the ruins of a world with brilliancy undiminished since the first days when it had sung together with its morning peers. The heart of the soul, like a starry jewel, had survived unchanged in darkness. Take any lines from " Lycidas " and the " Paradise Lost," and you may call both equally Miltonic, though twenty years of prose and tumult have passed between. Take any of the so familiar lines that have given to English the splendour of a classic tongue :—

" Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,

I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
 And with forced fingers rude
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year."

And then see with what unchanged and undiminished radiance the star of Milton shone when it again emerged :—

" Who shall tempt with wandering feet
 The dark unbottomed infinite abyss,
 And through the palpable obscure find out
 His uncouth way, or spread his æry flight
 Upborne with indefatigable wings
 Over the vast abrupt, till he arrive
 The happy isle ? "

Or compare " Il Penseroso " and " L'Allegro " with the fourth book of " Paradise Lost," which is a kind of exalted repetition of their themes :—

" Now came still Evening on, and Twilight gray
 Had in her sober livery all things clad ;
 Silence accompanied ; for beast and bird,
 They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
 Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale ;
 She all night long her amorous descant sung ;
 Silence was pleased."

And remember the same vivid perception suffused by the true scholar's memory, not of words, but of impressions in the early lines :—

" To behold the wandering moon,
 Riding near her highest noon,
 Like one that had been led astray
 Through the heaven's wide pathless way,
 And oft, as if her head she bowed,
 Stooping through a fleecy cloud."

In power of phrase, winning immortality by a sudden

glory, there survived the same Miltonic touch, unexercised for all those years. "The light fantastic toe," "Laughter holding both his sides," and "neat-handed Phillis," of the early poems, have passed into the common speech of England. And so no less have the "human face divine," the "sweet, reluctant, amorous delay," "imparadised in one another's arms," "thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled," "whom not to know argues himself unknown," and fifty more, while the "darkness visible" has passed from our common speech to all the world.

Somewhere through those years of noble warfare and rude contact with common fate, the soul of the greatest master of our language—a master standing on the same level with Virgil and Dante—had in hiding retained its splendour, though it dwelt apart, hardly remembered even by the man in whose mind it lurked. It is possible that, in spite of his eager occupation with the passing world, Milton lost something by the aloofness and isolation of his soul. There is a well-known criticism of Goethe upon Heine's enemy, Count von Platen, that he had every other gift, but wanted love. Sometimes, in turning from Milton to a far inferior man, one feels that there is even in him something of that want. With all the admiration that can never be given him in excess, there are few who could say that they loved him. Our people have given Byron, or even Burns, more love in a year than Milton has won in three centuries, for love is worth love. With all his supremacy over word and thought, all that miracle of associated meaning and mighty-mouthed invention of harmonies, it is seldom that he can drive the arrow of emotion straight into the heart of mankind, like Wordsworth with his simple-seeming rhyme :—

"She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be ;
But she is in her grave, and O !
The difference to me."

Nor was his star near enough the earth for laughter. For laughter and love we must go to other great names in our literature, and there are many.

But from Milton, whose soul thus dwelt apart, persistent in its isolation as in its brilliancy, we have received other things that none of our many writers have given. Mark Pattison, who was the finest of the poet's critics, has said, "An appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship" ; and to scholars there is in Milton the joy of communion with a soul that has been nourished only on the best of human thought. "Labour and intense study I take to be my portion in this life," wrote the poet, and the result of that labour was a mind so filled with beauty that it instinctively eschewed the vulgarity which is our country's besetting sin. And the common man who is no scholar may still find in the poet's life our noblest example of unyielding courage :—

"What though the field be lost ?
All is not lost ; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome."

The courage that does not flinch when the field is lost, the instance of a soul which can subsist with undimmed brightness beneath the cares of the world and the dust of conflict and the savage triumph of the commonplace—these are endowments that Milton has bequeathed to our nation more precious even than a language of ancient dignity, and poems that seem likely to survive our race.

III

THE AUDIENCE OF FREEDOM

I WAS once present at the performance of one of Maxim Gorky's plays in a Moscow theatre—the most beautiful, because the very simplest theatre I have seen. The play was called "Na Dnyé," which one may translate "In the Depths," "Submerged," or something of that kind, and it had once been tried by the Stage Society in London—with no success, as I gathered from the puzzled or contemptuous criticisms that reached me far away. But that night the usual crowd had assembled in Moscow to hear it again, and to them the play suggested neither puzzle nor contempt; for it was blood of their blood.

The audience was of a kind peculiar to Russia, and perhaps to the two Russian capitals—an audience of intellectual, highly educated, and sensitive people, neither rich nor poor; not poor, I mean, as most people are, obliged to labour continually for dear life, and having time to think of little else but food and warmth and children. Probably a good many landowners, merchants, and tradespeople had come, for in Russia it is not safe to assume stupidity even in the landowning class, and the queer conservatism of "Old Believer" merchants who live across the Moscow river is beginning to break up. Here and there also an officer, usually an army doctor, was conspicuous in the hated uniform. But the great majority were just ordinary educated people—

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barristers, physicians, architects, writers, hard-working men and women of all the classes that we call "professional," together with a crowd of the younger generation who will fill their places soon—boy and girl students, with indistinguishable hair, and indistinguishable blouses of scarlet or unrelieved black, fitting close up to the throat, buttoned along the top of one shoulder, and held round the waist by a leather band. Throughout Russian life, in spite of the ancient gulf between wealth and poverty, there is a sense of social equality, an indifference to distinctions of dress and class, a kind of family relationship, that it will take the English people some generations yet to reach. But in the audience listening to Gorky's play that night there were other reasons beside national tradition for the feeling of community and alliance that could almost be heard upon the silence.

It was the first anniversary of the Tsar's Manifesto, which the Russian people had greeted as the dawn of freedom come at last. Since that glád outburst, when the morning stars sang together, a year of disillusionment and defeat had gone by. The autocrat had broken every pledge. The Duma had been dissolved, the electoral law changed, the right of speech and printing suppressed. No more meetings were held, no more free papers published, no more processions of freedom moved along the streets. Spies, informers, and the secret police were at their time-honoured work. Town after town had been subjected to massacre, while the Government looked on, and the Tsar rewarded the agents of the bloodshed. In that very city of Moscow his representatives had goaded students and factory-hands into a rising which the army and police were ordered to crush down with almost unimaginable brutality, so that the credit

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of the Government might be re-established at home and abroad. Suspects had been hewn to pieces with swords in the police yards. Workmen and workwomen had been shot in batches without trial. The prisons had been crammed so full that prisoners were hanged to make room for more. Upon the living were inflicted tortures that cannot be described. The noblest and most highly gifted sons and daughters had disappeared from the midst of families, and no one knew where. Thousands had been killed, thousands were in gaol, thousands more—37,000 it was said—had been dropped into the oblivion of Siberia. In that audience there were young men and girls who, on mere suspicion of Liberalism, had been handed over to the soldiers, to be stripped naked and beaten with rods; and there were fathers, mothers, and lovers who had received the victims after the thing had been done. By brutality, by murder, treachery, and deeds of shame, the Government had triumphed again. Its credit had revived among the Powers of Europe. France had agreed to pay her own interest on the capital she had already sunk in her alliance with the Tsar. For the first time in fifty years English finance had ventured on a Russian Government loan. Already there were rumours of the present understanding between the British Liberal Government and the Government of the Tsar. At every point the forces of despotism had won, and the Prime Minister, Stolypin, had just secured the fruits of victory by laying the whole country under new courts-martial, with power to hang or shoot at pleasure.

And now that audience, the heirs of the long and vain struggle for freedom, defeated and tormented, their brightest hope quenched, and the rising light obscured, sat in silent community to watch this ordinary

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drama of human life. It was a scene such as I myself, a stranger, had witnessed often enough within a mile of that very theatre. The play is laid in a subterranean doss-house, where any man or woman can get a sloping plank for a bed at one shilling or two shillings a week, according to quality. As I looked at the stage, I felt again that universal smell of poverty, the same in Moscow as in Shadwell—that stench of old clothes and humanity, mingled in the stifling air which is the substitute for warmth. I could see again the cavernous lairs which I had visited—so dark that once it was only a glimmer of something pale upon the ground which prevented me from treading on the face of a man who had lain there drunk for a day and a night in his cesspool, while above his head his baby's cradle bobbed up and down on a spring attached to the ceiling, as is the Russian way. I almost seemed to see the tarakans, or Russian cockroaches, crawling over the sacred eikons, and clustered so thick upon the stove that not a speck of its white surface could appear.

And upon that gloomy and cavernous stage, men and women moved dimly about, as they move in life. The locksmith's wife was dying; he sat at her side, working his file continually, that he might pay for her funeral, and good riddance. "Blows and insults are all I have known," she murmurs. "All my life I have trembled—all my poor life. Why is it?" She thinks she could endure to live a little longer, but it is the end, and soon she has done coughing, as someone notices with relief. On the other shelves lie a broken-down actor, a ruined baron, an intellectual drunkard, a neurotic girl, and casuals who come and go with misery. The lodging-house woman prompts her lover to her husband's murder, and she herself

almost tears her rival in love to pieces. The actor hangs himself. Outcries of fury and brutal taunts are heard. Men and women rend each other in helpless fury, being a little lower than the animals. Wailings of new-born babies come from further caves of darkness, as if to show man's wretchedness shall never lack inheritors. Now and again a railway whistle sounds from the upper air, or the police intrude to add the torment of the law. Men sleep, and fight, and eat, and all the time the dead lies there among them, and the card-playing goes on.

In the midst of the utmost turmoil, a Tartar continues to expound the Koran, and sways backwards and forwards upon his plank in prayer. At times the lost souls raise among them the Russian song, beginning :—

“ The sun arises and he sets,
But prison's always dark.”

The music is one of those melodies of a sweetness almost unbearable in sorrow, such melodies as are found only in Russia—pressed, as it were, from the heart of that sad people. And, like the music, utterances of unbearable sorrow are just heard upon the stage, and are gone—half-forgotten memories, a snatch at hopes never to be fulfilled, resolves that will never be kept. The common basis of mankind stands here revealed ; these are the things of fate which the lowest and highest share, and we seem to overhear the whirring of the universal wheel to which we are all fast bound. But up and down among the damned moves an unknown pedlar, speaking now and then some simple and unexpected word, that brings a sudden happiness—some comfortable lie, perhaps, drawn from the depths of that human tenderness

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which must give comfort, though it lie to give it. "It is only in hope of something better that you can endure to live," he says.

So the common little pageant of life passed before the audience, and they saw in it a further incitement to that movement to which they were all consecrated. Kropotkin in his "Memoirs" has told us what that consecration means. He has told us of the stern self-education among the party of freedom in his day ; of the sincerity so rare in Western Europe—the sincerity that will not smile unless it is glad, nor spare a man's feelings in politeness or flattery—and of the austerity that grants no extra consideration even to women beyond comradeship, and no chivalrous feeling beyond equality. In the Basaroff of Tourgénéieff's "Fathers and Sons," we see such sincerity and austerity in their fullest forms, combined with a consequent disregard for pleasing conversation and pretty arts. But all austerity, if indeed it implies a sacrifice, is compensated for by a freedom from minor interests and restraints. The members of the Movement have no occasion for the boredom of trivialities, and nowhere does one find such liberty, distinguished from vulgarity, of social intercourse as among Russian revolutionists. Let us again remember what Kropotkin says, speaking of the Tchaykóvsky circle :—

"I was in a family of men and women so closely united by their common object, and so broadly and delicately humane in their mutual relations, that I cannot now recall a single moment of even temporary friction marring the life of our circle. Those who have had any experience of political agitation will appreciate the value of this statement."

• The bond of a common object, and the bond of a

common danger—those were the two things whose presence could be felt among the audience that night in Mpscow, and without both of them together, I doubt if the highest form of community is ever possible. In the hope of such community everything may be gladly dared and gladly endured. That, I suppose, was Ibsen's meaning when he congratulated Tour-génieff, or some other Russian writer, upon living under a bloody despotism. There is nowhere on earth such freedom as among comrades who, in the contest with tyranny, can make light of laws and take the gaol and death for honour, nor have I known any tribute to the dead more enviable than when at St Petersburg I saw a vast concourse of men and women rise in silence and remain standing while the long list of those who had been executed for the sake of liberty in the last eighty years was read out. But that was in 1905, and the list must be fully four times as long by now.

When the Russian workmen held their meetings during the general strike that forced the treacherous Constitution from the Tsar, they would begin business by solemnly chanting three times in repetition, the simple words, "To their eternal memory." It was the memory of the fallen leaders of freedom which was celebrated in that workmen's anthem, and around me that night in Moscow were many to whose memory it is now being sung. These were the natural successors and co-heirs of the Decembrists, massacred on Nicholas I.'s accession, of the Nihilists, the early Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats; even of the Cadets and Zemstvoists, for none who have worked for liberty, no matter with what moderation, can be omitted from the roll. "We have begun a great thing," said Sophie Perovskaya to Kropotkin in the

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early days of the movement "To the People"; "two generations, perhaps, will succumb to the task, and yet it must be done." One full generation has now gone by since she was hanged, and I was standing among the second. Certainly, it was a time of defeat and bloodthirsty repression :—

" The sun arises and he sets,
But prison's always dark."

The tyranny had never seemed so strong and savage as it was then, though it has shown itself stronger and more confident since. But with all their imprisonment, and exile, and murder, the Government had not put out the old fire of liberty. They had only driven the movement back upon the old lines of contest, and with leaders lost and hopes frustrated, the ranks of the eternal opposition were still full. Two more generations may succumb, but the great thing will be done. It was with envy as well as admiration that I looked round upon that audience, held in silence under the spell of a dramatist who was one of themselves, and had known danger and suffering as they knew them. Here at all events were Liberals who contemplated no compromise, no understanding, or agreement with the enemy of freedom. Here were people who, under stress of danger for the noblest of human causes, had entered into the joy of community.

IV

KNIGHTS OF THE WORD

HAD a German professor in his study exclaimed that the Ballad of Chevy Chase stirred him like the sound of a trumpet, the phrase would have become laughable rather than renowned. It was because Philip Sidney knew the sound of trumpets blowing for war that his words still fly across three centuries. In the house of literature are many abiding places, and it takes all kinds to make the world of mind. There is room for the slippered scholar and the harmless drudge. Somewhere in that mansion we must find room for the type of Wagner, who, when Faust was yearning to follow the sinking sun like a crane upon its homeward flight, replied :—

“ I’ve felt queer whimsies in myself at times,
But such a craze as that I’ve never known.
One’s easy sick of forest and of fields,
Nor can I share your envy of a bird.
’Tis nobler far when intellectual joys
Wing us from page to page, from book to book ! ”

We must make room for the Wagners, and in some quiet limbo we will gather the laborious emendators and editors of texts. True scholarship shall have its reward, even though it rise to glory in a German dressing-gown. With all honour, we will assist at the Grammarian’s funeral—perhaps even with a chastened joy. We know his devotion, his disregard of present

life and pleasure, as long as an iota remains to be correlated :—

“ So, with the throttling hands of death at strife;
 Ground he at grammar ;
 Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife ;
 While he could stammer
 He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be !—
 Properly based *Oun*—
 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
 Dead from the waist down.”

Certainly, the Grammarian is above praise. He is like an astronomer, almost miraculous. Only, there are some things on which we will not allow the Grammarian to speak, just as Emerson said we must not allow a doctor to speak about love ; and if we want to hear the sound of a trumpet in Chevy Chase, we turn to Philip Sidney, who knew the sound of trumpets blowing to war.

The wind of genius blows where it lists, and action is no necessity for either thought or style. Spinoza ground glasses, and we read of William Blake that for years he never left his room off the Strand, except to fetch his pot of porter from the corner public-house. But there is something we find irresistible in the writing of men who have borne a part in the clash and struggle of the outside world, and yet have retained the sensitiveness of the poet's vision. Such a man was Æschylus, who shared the charge at Marathon, and joined the song of freedom when at Salamis the little galleys put out into the strait. Such was Sophocles, who commanded a fleet as reward for his verse. Such was Cervantes, who lost a hand at Lepanto, and was for five years a slave to Paynims. Lovelace knew what prisons were, and swords, horses, and shields ; else we should not care what he said of stone walls and

iron bars, or of honour either. Dante's exile wrote his poem, and Byron's death in the cause of freedom transfigured his works with a radiance not their own.

It was a true instinct that made Goethe refuse to write war songs, even for the War of Liberation. "I must leave that," he said, "to a man who has known what it is to sleep under the stars, with horse and sword at his side." So it was the scout, Theodor Körner, who wrote the "Song of the Sword," and "Lützow's Ride." Gibbon's saying about the advantage of even a militia service for historians is well known. Want of vital experience makes Tacitus almost foolish when his story follows the legions to the frontiers, and in the *Æneid* we feel for certain that Virgil never knew what battle was. Some things no man can safely borrow, and one who has never been in war or love had better hold his peace about them. No one would care what Thoreau, Jefferies, or Wordsworth said of nature, if they had known her only in books, or on excursions from comfortable and urbane society. Devotion and a sacrifice of the unessential are needed for the first-hand knowledge that counts, as for all initiation. But passionate sorrow for his country served to girdle Clarence Mangan with steel, and the long pain, through which his power of beauty subsisted, raised Heine to the knighthood of the spirit, as surely as a battlefield in heathendom, or a controversy with the Inquisition.

It was a natural lot that selected the Knight to tell the first and most charming tale of Chaucer's pilgrims:—

"At mortal batailles had he been fiftene
And foughten for our feith at Tramassene."

His whole character and bearing, as the poet describes him, reveal the true Knight of the Spirit, as well as the

sword, and it is from such men that we sometimes get a definite and trenchant beauty of word, like steel. Something of this keen and gleaming style we find, for instance, in those little books and stories which Mr Cunninghame Graham now and again flings to the world as though, with Cyrano, he cried, "Mais quel geste!" One such book of his has just come my way, and set me on this train of chivalrous reflection. It is a little-known book, though with careless pride it claims a third edition within ten years. Too little known all his books probably are, for they move with a "like it or leave it" air, and noblesse has laid their author under no obligation to please the crowd. "It was not penned for the general benefit of mankind, nor to increase knowledge, either scientific or theological," he says of these "Notes on the District of Menteith," and we observe with pleasure that all rights are reserved "except in the Republic of Paraguay." It is exactly in Paraguay that one would expect a large circulation for the volume.

Of all living writers, probably Mr Cunninghame Graham comes nearest one's conception of the Knight in literature. The classical passage upon his personality is discovered in the notes to "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." We may recall a few scattered sentences :—

"There are moments," says Mr Shaw, "when I do not myself believe in his existence. And yet he must be real, for I have seen him with these eyes. . . . The battle of Trafalgar Square, in which he personally and bodily assailed civilisation as represented by the concentrated military and constabular forces of the capital of the world, can scarcely be forgotten by the more discreet spectators, of whom I was one. . . . He is a fascinating mystery to a sedentary person like myself. . . . His tales of adventure have the true Cervantes touch of the man

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who has been there. . . . He is, I regret to add, an impenitent and unashamed dandy."

"The man who has been there"—that, for our present purpose, is the important thing. In this little book upon his native Menteith, he tells of the ceaseless old battles between Grahams and M'Gregors across that bog-land at the foot of hills. "Gone are the riders of Menteith," he says; "the ruggers and the reivers are at one with those they harried." But he is quite mistaken. The wild blood of these children of the mist is beating still. He is, himself, the riders of Menteith, standing ever ready with lance and sword to harry the lowland shepherds of the commonplace. As outlaw of thought and civilisation's rebel, he has struck many a flashing blow at dullard custom and the cruelty that looks so soft and legal. Whether he is tracing the cab-horse's progress or denouncing an alliance against Russian liberty, one finds in him always the same knightly quality; and the distinction of the true knight is the union of sensitiveness with courage.

Whether he is to be called successful, I hardly know; though anyone who has seen him ought to discern it. For in this book he says himself: "Success, like drink, is sure to mar a face. The price that is paid for it is sure to leave its mark." In repeating the short roll-call of chivalry, I do not remember ever to have heard of a successful knight, whether of the sword or of the spirit. The losing cause, the perilous quest, the perpetual battle—those are the things that we connect with knighthood. But the gift to the world is a war-cry that vexes the dull ear of habit, and a blow like that of the magic sword, which a man hardly felt till he shook himself and fell in halves.

V

THE KINDLING OF THE FLAME

IN the life of every prophet there comes a supreme crisis when he has to fling away his past, wipe off all trivial, fond records, and cut himself loose from old interests and delights, because an inward fire consumes him, or savage indignation tears his heart. Against that crisis he may struggle as he will. He may plead unclean lips and unfitness for the task ; he may hide himself in the wilderness, or take ship for Tarshish. It is all in vain. The still, small voice pursues him ; the fire kindles ; land and sea conspire to drive him along a grim and lonely road. He may think his journey will be as brief as it is unpleasant ; he may hope for a speedy return, and suppose the past is not irretrievable ; he may even imagine that with one hand he can retain a hold on things that were so pleasing—things that he will enjoy again in grateful satisfaction when once this sharp battle is over. But he will never return ; he may let all those dear delights alone for ever ; the zeal of the Lord will eat him up.

These thoughts arise as we examine the volume of the great edition of Ruskin's work—as noble a monument as was ever raised by the devotion of scholars and disciples—which begins the series of "Fors Clavigera." It brings us to the supreme crisis in Ruskin's life. He was over fifty, and at the height of his fame. For nearly thirty years his power had been recognised. The leading minds of the country

were his friends ; his innumerable admirers were eloquent in his praise ; the University he loved had bestowed on him the work and honour he most desired. He knew the secret beauty of skies and mountains and of rivers. Like the old king, he had spoken of trees, from the cedar trees to the hyssop that springs out of the wall ; he had spoken also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes ; and his utterances in beautiful language were a thousand and five. He had penetrated the recesses of noble history, and the finest arts of word, and colour, and marble, and gold, and bronze, and living stone stood always about his mind, like women passionately loved. To him, if to any man, life seemed to hold a cup full of fine flavours. But the cruelty and sorrow of the world gave him no peace. The misery of the poor and the stupidity of the powerful entered into his soul. Unwillingly, the fire was kindled, and cruel rage urged him whither he had no wish to go.

“ I will endure it no longer quietly,” he cries in the first letter of “ Fors ” :—

“ For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. . . . I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can intepret too bitterly. Therefore, as I have said, I will endure it no longer quietly.”

Of course, all his friends, all his reviewers, all the thousands who expected from him only more and more of those beautiful disquisitions upon pictures and poetry and nature, were shocked and indignant at the change. Of course, they joined the startled cowards who thought Ruskin was all right as long as he stuck to his arts, and did not desert the province of a literary

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man for the practical affairs in which business is business, or for the political affairs in which compromise is the breath of life. "Why cannot you go on with your proper work?" they kept asking him. "That is your business; why can't you mind it and be happy?" Once, from Venice, he answered them:

"I would fain please you, and myself with you; and live here in my Venetian palace, luxurious; scrutinant of dome, cloud, and cockle-shell. . . . But, alas! my prudent friends, little enough of all that I have a mind to may be permitted me. For this green tide that eddies by my threshold is full of floating corpses, and I must leave my dinner to bury them, since I cannot save. . . . This green sea-tide!—yes, and if you knew it, your black and sulphurous tides also—Yarrow, and Teviot, and Clyde, and the stream, for ever now drumly and dark as it rolls on its way, at the ford of Melrose."

To such as sneered at him for bringing "sentiment" to the decision of commercial and international affairs, he gave a sterner answer, as in that overwhelming passage of self-defence in the forty-first letter:—

"Because I have passed my life in almsgiving, not in fortune-hunting; because I have laboured always for the honour of others, not my own; because I have lowered my rents, and assured the comfortable lives of my poor tenants, instead of taking from them all I could force for the roofs they needed; because I love a wood walk better than a London street, and would rather watch a seagull fly than shoot it, and rather hear a thrush sing than eat it; finally, because I never disobeyed my mother, because I have honoured all women with solemn worship, and have been kind even to the unthankful and the evil; therefore, the hacks of English art and literature wag their heads at me, and the poor wretch who pawns the dirty linen of his soul daily for a bottle of sour wine and a cigar, talks of the "effeminate sentimentality of Ruskin."

Against himself the struggle was harder. It is true that for ten years before he began the issue of "Fors"

his mind had been turned to the injustice and false doctrine of modern labour, and in those years he had written the three text-books of a new economy. For that matter, the roots of all his later teaching may be traced in one of his boyhood's essays on Westmoreland cottages, just as Tolstoy, whom indignation and pity have driven along a similar road, gave the forecast of his future rebellion in his earliest imaginative works. But in “Fors” the final separation from that rich and many-coloured past is made—though unwillingly, and with much looking back, and with hopes of return. “I began these letters,” he writes, “as a by-work to quiet my conscience.” And again, he sighs that for the strife he “must leave this spiritual land and fair domain of human art and natural peace.” And again, speaking of his St George's Guild, he says: “That it should be left to me to begin such a work is alike wonderful and sorrowful to me.”

He reminds one of Hamlet—the Hamlet whom Goethe compared to a costly vase in which a tree had been planted; the roots expand, the vase is shattered. Like Hamlet when he meets the friend of student days, or goes back to dramatic criticism, or turns his hand to those dozen or sixteen lines as in the days when poetry seemed important, so Ruskin throughout these letters returns now and again with delight to the finest themes of his early manhood's pursuit. Inter-mixed with flashing strokes in the controversies upon housing, and clothing, and wages, and interest, and the Paris Commune, and the Billingsgate fish supply, we have vistas into the vanishing realms of exquisite criticism and tender reminiscence, of noble history and beautiful coinage, of myths, and pictures, and mountains. And he was himself conscious of the unhappiness that always lies in compromise. He

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could endure no longer either the misery of the world or its beauty. Torn between them, he went his way sorrowful. "I have no peace," he writes, "still less ecstasy."

So the roots expanded ; the costly vase was broken. But the gain far surpassed any possible loss. To that inspired sense for beauty which he appeared to abandon we owe the characteristic power of his indignation—the admixture of rage and irony with a tenderness as of one who, seeing his city, weeps over it. Swift has been called the spirit of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place. If Ruskin had the spirit of Swift, it dwelt in the "sober landscape and austere" of his early Italian masters. From the treasury of a full life and vivid knowledge he poured all its wealth for the cause that possessed him. Outward results are slow, but at least the self-complacency and deliberate acquiescence in hideous wrongs against which "Fors" led the attack, have been seen to stagger, and, at the worst, it was "Fors" that gave us an example stronger than eloquence. "Every man feels instinctively," Ruskin writes, "that all the beautiful sentiments in the world count less than a single lovely action." His action was a difficult sacrifice, and for its difficulty it counts the higher.

VI

A POET'S YOUTH

CRINOLINES were just past their prime, though they lingered yet, like the last roses of summer. It was a period of innocent archness and unimpassioned propriety, of seaside lodgings on the sands, and family life unalloyed—an enviable period of complacent satisfaction and solid domestic furniture. With Free Trade and the extension of machinery, the country's prosperity was beginning to leap and bound. Manufacturing towns, called hives of industry, were spreading over the north and midlands, so that the very clouds dropped a kind of fatness. The middle classes had come into their own, and, perhaps, a little more than their own. Statesmen and preachers assured them week by week that they were the secret of England's greatness, nor had they much hesitation in applying to themselves the blessings promised to a Chosen People.

Uncomfortable voices, it is true, had been sounding in their ears, for a period of great literature was just passing away. But custom had dulled them to their prophets, and Carlyle was "so savage," Ruskin "so sweet," Browning "so obscure," Thackeray "so cynical," Dickens "so funny," George Eliot "not quite respectable." Prophets soon run flat, and, besides, you must always make some allowance for "clever people," "oddities," "eccentrics," or whatever was the contemporary phrase for "cranks."

Morris's "Guenevere," foreshadowing the future, had fallen dead at birth, Rossetti's poems still lay buried in a woman's coffin. It was most reassuring to reflect that the man whom even clever people acknowledged to be the greatest English poet living, was thoroughly in agreement with the backbone of the country, spoke slightly of the red fool-fury of the Seine, and the falsehood of extremes, praised a freedom that slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent, and for the delicate matter of the affections invoked white-favoured horses waiting at the door. It is true he had written "The Lotus Eaters," which was melancholy, and "Maud," which was morbid, but he had lately atoned for those extravagances by dedicating the wholesome "Idylls of the King" to the memory of poor Prince Albert.

Full in the face of this public, young Mr Swinburne flung his "Poems and Ballads." It was one of the startling events in English history, and the public foamed or fainted according to sex. We need not suppose that their wrath was affected, or their horror hypocritical. There was a deep and sudden plunge from "The Angel in the House" to "Dolores," from "The Courtship of Miles Standish" to "The Leper," from Tennyson's meek questionings of immortality to the proud negation of "The Garden of Proserpine." It requires an exceptional vitality to enjoy a change like that. Everything was going along so pleasantly, so decently. The British householder felt like Matthew Arnold's shepherd when the Bacchanals came rushing in upon his quiet evening scene :—

"Shepherd, what ails thee, then ?
Shepherd, why mute ?

.

Is not, on cheeks like those,
Lovely the flush ?
Ah, so the quiet was !
So was the hush ! ”

The poems involved an immense disturbance in all the atmosphere of daily existence—in the very meanings of love and passion, of freedom and progress, and of life and death. The first volume of Wordsworth and Coleridge would have been similarly disturbing to the literary public at the end of the previous century, if they had recognized its significance. But they overlooked it as harmless, and Swinburne could not be overlooked. The impetuosity of his onset, the splendour of his rhetoric, the newly discovered beauty of forms that at first reading fixed the resounding or alluring lines for ever in the mind—these things overtook and captured attention. There was no getting away, no matter how much one regretted the peaceful calm of yesterday. Hate them as one might, both themes and beauty were irresistible, and the uneasy public felt like a tourist, when, falling under the enchantment of a sorceress of the desert, he looks back upon suburban dances.

That peculiar beauty was really part of a widespread protest against the common hideousness of modern industrial life and its supposed dulness. Unconsciously, perhaps, the protest had begun with Scott and his romances of bright adventure and coloured existence in earlier centuries. Wordsworth and Byron and Shelley had carried it on, and made it the dominant note of the century's art. But with Rossetti and the small circle of painters and poets who stood around him, there had appeared a further and more spiritualized refinement of beauty, that sought a haven of refuge rather than a battlefield, and found

it chiefly in a Middle Age of sacred colour and symbolic raiment, of passionate worship, of sad devotion, of twilight mills and lonely towers, where purple water runs under ancient walls and the air is charged with mysterious lights, and gleams of armour, and sighs of longing. Passing through this enchanted world of mere and moat and arras, Swinburne found a region of escape, more distant in time but much nearer to us in thought and feeling, among the mountains and gulfs of Greece, and among the imperial palaces of Rome. There he could realise his visions of glad or mournful beauty, and utter his fearless "criticism of life," untrammelled by modern traditions and unwarped by the harassing details of our common days. Success was his justification, as it is the only justification for any art, and there was no question of his success. Recall for a moment a few words only from poems that have so strangely now become the boasted possession of the English people—so strangely, because the English nature, being queerly made up of different elements, is as full of tricks and surprises as a half-bred horse. Remember the choruses of "Atalanta":—

"We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair ! thou art goodly, O Love."

Or :—

"Who hath given man speech ? or who hath set therein,
A thorn for peril and a snare for sin ?"

Or almost any random verse from the "Poems and Ballads":—

"Oh, sister, sister, thy first-begotten !
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child's blood crying yet,
Who hath remembered me ? Who hath forgotten ?

Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
But the world shall end when I forget."

Or, again :—

"Nay, I will sleep then only ; nay, but go,
Ah, sweet, too sweet to me, my sweet, I know
Love, sleep, and death go to the sweet, same tune ;
Hold my hair fast, and kiss me through it so.
Ah, God ! ah, God ! that day should be so soon."

There was no question of his success. The apprehensive critics knew that it was just his success in beauty which made him dangerous. But the danger did not lie exactly where they supposed. Every genuine passion purifies, burning up the commonplace, which is the clog and chokeweed of the world. The danger lay in the aloofness of one who, pursuing beauty in far-off scenes and times, becomes deaf and blind to present things. The sect of followers and imitators who overran England within fifteen years of Swinburne's startling entrance were of some interest and perhaps received more than they lost from their own elect seclusiveness. To them it was mainly an affair of external things—dress and furniture and pictures and books, and distaste for uncomfortable realities. As such we may count it of little importance. But the case of the poet himself was different, and it was his enemies only who rejoiced when some perverted sense of beauty turned him aside from the ideal of liberty which he had proclaimed with an eloquence and fervour unknown in England since Shelley's death. There have been two test questions for lovers of liberty in our day and country—the misgovernment of Ireland, and the extinction of the South African Republics. That the poet of "Songs before Sunrise," and the pleader for the Manchester Fenians of 1867, should have been blind and deaf to

the struggle for freedom when it lay close before his feet and was not yet illumined by distant time or the glamour of great names and picturesque adventures, is a more direct sign of some flaw in his art and method than all the laughter and absurdity and tragedy into which the "æsthetic movement" sank at last.

But our greatest poet is just seventy, as I write (April 1907), and to-day we will remember only his youth—only the years when to the young of England he appeared as a bright new star leading them to the discovery of strange seas, and mysterious islands, and radiant cities where none but freedom sat enthroned. Few great poets have fought a more difficult contest, or conducted it with greater courage and self-reliance; few of the fighting poets have won such ungrudging admiration in their lifetime. He gave a new beauty to our language, and by a passionate enthusiasm helped to redeem a peculiarly self-complacent time. When Heine lay dying, he said a sentry's place in the outposts of liberty would soon be vacant. Swinburne has also stood among those heroic outposts, and it is as the pensioner of liberty that we honour him.

VII

A LEAGUE OF AGE

It is one of those many things not generally known that a "League of Age" has recently been established, having its headquarters at the sign of "The Golden Vanity," in Charing Cross. Its motto is "Older and Bolder"; its single precept runs, "We must grow old, but need not grow nasty"; and the society is bound by only one rule, that every member over fifty shall risk his life, fortune, or reputation in some warlike, political, or other adventure at least once every year. There is no subscription, but all trophies, whether of a defeated enemy's scalp or stupidity, pass into the possession of the League to defray the expenses of the annual dinner that is held at the winter solstice and lasts twenty-four hours. Women are admitted to membership on equal terms, but they are allowed the privilege of taking the risks under fifty, if they desire them.

Undoubtedly, the institution of such a corporation is a sign of modern tendency. The traditional qualities of the old and the young are changing places, and now it is crabbed youth and age that cannot live together. Youth is full of care, age of sport. Youth is weak and cold, age is hot and bold. We know men and women whose opinions advance a mile with every whitening hair, and for sober counsel and discreet we turn to the sad boy-graduates of twenty-two. "What doth gravity out of bed at midnight?" is

now asked of solemn young figures just come up from college to offer the solution so long awaited for the evils of mankind. Had Wordsworth lived into these days, he would have been spared the bathos of a line that mars one of the noblest English poems. If he had known how quick would be the transfer between the attributes of youth and age, he would not have written about the "years that bring the philosophic mind." The gain to truth as well as beauty in his glorious Ode would have equalled the pleasure of another half-century of life. Years no longer bring the philosophic mind; rather, they take it away, for it is the young who now philosophise. Or, if ageing minds philosophise at all, they follow the cheerful and concrete schools of fishing, golf, and cabbages.

I suspect that in nature this was always so, only that man has been frightened by the solemnity of the teachers who invoked him continually to ponder his latter end; and, as a rule, their latter end is nearer to the old than the young. "*Memento mori*" has been the curse of mankind, reducing us a little lower than the animals, who seldom think of death, whereas nearly all divines have followed Cicero in supposing that the properest human study is to die. It is this doctrine that has infected growing age with melancholy, as was seen in the gloomy terrors which haunted Dr Johnson, by nature so blithe and venturesome to the last. A kind of after-shadow from the same idea darkened even the deliberate Stoicism of Matthew Arnold, who need have had no apprehension, seeing that he died in early age after leaping a fence. Yet, in perverse and fruitless anticipation, he wrote many unpleasant things in answer to the question, "What is it to grow old?" finishing with the lamentable verse:—

“ It is—last stage of all—
When we are frozen up within and quite
The phantom of ourselves,
To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost,
Which blamed the living man.”

How much more human is the ordinance in Plato's *Laws* that old men should be allowed a little wine to make them sing ! How much more divine Spinoza's deduction that the free man's meditation will not be a meditation of death, but of life ! It were almost profane to call the Rabbi Ben Ezra jolly ; yet, compared to that chilling Stoic, what a merry note he chants from his first lines onward :—

“ Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made.”

Youth is the solemn and melancholy time. It is youth that digs beneath the cypress shade, and calls for death to come away. Hear youth discussing the affairs of State or the problems of the universe, and you will escape with relief to the merry pranks of age. It is a sweet despair that afflicts the young, but a grievous none the less, and only by memory of his own pompous days can the grown man protect himself against their portentous seriousness. “ How can you endure so clamly the aggression of the young ? ” Goethe was asked, and he replied :—

“ To call them unbearable I'd have a right,
If I had not been so unbearable too.”

“ When the melancholy and distress of youth are past,” writes a great medical authority upon cerebral dyspepsia, “ the adult patient often attacks his food with the vigour and success of a boy.” Equanimity

and a wide tolerance are but natural results of the experience that worketh hope, and from the improved digestion of middle-age we may expect an increasing zest and cheerfulness in life. These are among the thousand fine qualities that so endear Falstaff to every honest heart. He was no longer an eagle's talon in the waist, but whatever was his age in years, he remained always the youngest there. "What, ye knaves, young men must live!" he cries; and, again, of the travellers, "Whoreson caterpillars! Bacon-fed knaves! They hate us youth." It is the very spirit of sixty-five or seventy that speaks. In the modern world, this excellent spirit appears to be spreading more widely, as we said. The average age of high achievement is rising. When he began his essays, Montaigne was still short of forty, yet he writes as though his active career were as necessarily over as a modern Leicester operative's of the same age. He is inclined to think that all the great enterprises of mankind have been accomplished by men under thirty, and he gives as instances that Augustus was supreme judge of the world at nineteen, and Alexander died at thirty-two. But life has now become more secure, the opportunities of genius are distributed over greater length of years, and if Alexander had been permeated with quinine, he might have discovered the other hemisphere, and the United States had now been Hellenic instead of Yankee. Kant was nearly sixty when he shook the theology of ages. Moltke waited till seventy before he won his chiefest glory on the field. Gladstone was seventy-five before he set out upon the noblest and most daring revolution of his life.

In all fiction there are but two faultless masculine characters—Don Quixote and Mr Pickwick—and both

are men of mature age. In Mr Pickwick we see the sunlit benevolence of years, the unlimited tolerance, the imperturable temper that, when a difficulty arises about hot water, can still exclaim: "Thank you; cool will do!" That is the lovable temperament which we may suppose the League of Age aims at inculcating by its precept that we must grow old but need not grow nasty. In Don Quixote we see the other type of honourable age—the type which the League encourages as well by its motto, "Older and Bolder," as by its one rule ordaining on members the risk of life, fortune, or reputation at least once a year. Grey hairs are the banner of adventure, the new white plume of Navarre; and the more we reflect on that truth, the more natural it appears. We find caution in the young, and we must make all allowances for their case. With care they may possess a long and enviable future, full of joyful deeds. Unless they exercise their habitual prudence now, they might lose that inestimable possession. But for an old man's caution there can be neither pardon nor excuse.

Year by year the old man and the middle-aged have less and less to lose, less and less that they need fear risking. In compensation for the irretrievable loss of youth, we confidently look to them for the elderly virtues of rashness, recklessness, and a certain splendour of generosity. That is why increasing age is full of noble illusions, always longs for increasing adventure, and stands ever ready to prick out, happy as a lover, upon some high emprise for human kind. That is why, speaking from the divided flame in the eighth ditch of the eighth circle, the soul of Ulysses told how, after his return from Troy, neither his affection for his son, nor his piety to his father, nor the love that ought to have comforted Penelope could

restrain his longing to win further experience of the world and of man's sin and virtue ; and how, with one ship and his little crew of comrades, he steered west between the Pillars, and there cheered them on (for they were old and slow) with the words : " My brothers, who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the West at last, it is but a little vigil your lives have still to keep. Do not, then, grudge yourselves the knowledge of the unpeopled land behind the sun. Consider from what seed you spring : you were not made to live like brutes, but to follow courage and wisdom like a sinking star." Whereon nothing could hold them more, until they reached the place where night gazes upon the other pole, with all its constellations.

VIII

THE JOYS OF AGE

OF all the New Year it was the maddest, merriest day. No need to call them early ; they had long been awake for joy. Breakfast could hardly be eaten for excitement, and before nine the carriages were at the door. Eight beautiful carriages, with room for sixteen in each and four on the box ! And three horses to each carriage—that made twenty-four in all, enough to mount cavalry, thought some ! “ Prime ’orses, too ! ” said old Mr Jameson, and he had a right to speak, having cleaned ’bus-horses for fifty years from the day that a ’bus took his leg off, what time our fathers worshipped faper hats and lilac trousers.

Up got the ladies into the three first vans. “ Mother, mother, wait for me ! ” cried an old man, and scrambled in beside his wife, who had buried all their children long ago. Three others came and sat beside their wives. One pair had lately married, no one being able to raise any just cause or impediment why they should not be joined together in holy matrimony, and so they had secured the comfortable married quarters. “ This ’ere’s our ‘ oneymoon,” said the man, and the carriage creaked with feminine laughter.

“ Right behind,” cried the last conductor, and in single file the brakes moved away from the door. A crowd of children on the pavement raised a cheer. “ Bless ’em ! ” said the workmen’s wives, holding up

their babies to look, "It's good to see the old people enjy theirselves."

At first they were silent, and sat staring in front of them, almost amazed, while their bones were rattled over the stones. "Good job it ain't rainin'," said one at last, to encourage sociability. "Glad old Blowhard's got a fine day to his funeral," returned another, with cheerful sympathy, but the conversation collapsed.

Presently they emerged through long rows of decent suburb into a country of open fields and hedgerow trees, with here and there a little wood, and here and there a residential mansion, where roses grew, and tennis courts were being marked out for the young gentlemen and ladies in the afternoon. "Now we're at large," said one of the women, and she took off the brown shawl such as all were wearing, and displayed the dark linen dress that all were wearing, too. "I like being at large, I do," she went on, "not as I've anything against them as don't, nor yet by reason of me never getting out. I'm let out twice a week, through being old enough to look after myself now, praise God, and well-behaved, too."

"Whenever I've been for a treat, I've always tried not to be disagreeable to no one," retorted another, with a wealth of stored-up meaning.

"I'm sorry to incommode you, I'm sure, Mrs Benson," said the first speaker, "but there's some not fit to look after themselves, no matter for how old. And there's some has to be knocked off their leave for weeks every time after bein' at large."

"Now don't be hard on us to-day, Mrs Turner," said a blue-eyed woman. "There's none on us knows which may be betrayed into something next. Don't the hay smell lovely layin' out on the fields? As owdacious a crop as ever I see in Worcestershire, where

I was born, maid, and married. Most owdacious ! but I doubt they'll carry it through its bein' sodden with the wet."

Instead of the ceilings and drab walls and well-scrubbed boards, with the familiar smell of sanitary cleanliness, the big sky was over them now, the wheels splashed through puddles of sweet-smelling rain, and the wind blew across hayfields and hedges of wild rose. Keeping their hands covered in their shawls, they looked about them quietly with patient, faded eyes. Their faces were grey as ghosts in the fitful sunshine. The brakes stopped to water the horses. The men got stiffly out, and stood leaning over gates, or looking at the bar, and smelling the mixture of beer and sawdust. Then they drove on again. "The ride's always the best part of a treat," said Mrs Turner.

"It's a compensation," answered Mrs Benson sweetly. "That's what it is—a compensation."

They reached the field, where they were to play, and drove in through the gate upon the real grass, the horses throwing up their heads, for they felt the soft turf under their feet as when they were young. Dinner was served in a big shed—"first-rate meat," they all said it was, and so was the tart, and the ginger beer.

"This hair do make one 'ungry," said an old man at the end.

"It ain't the hair so much as the sightseein'," said a woman. "We learn to be abstemious where we are, through livin' always the same. No 'ousekeepin' to do, no children to mind, nor yet no rent to get together—it was them things kep' us 'ungry whiles we had 'em."

"Don't you be complainin', Mrs Wilson," said another. "We got a nice clean place where we are,

and always a bit to eat, and a good bed to sleep on. I always was one for a good bed."

"I'm not complainin'," answered Mrs Wilson, "I'm only sayin'."

After dinner the men went for a walk round the village. The shopkeepers came to the doors to look at them, and the village children followed them up and down; they looked so queer in their blue serge suits and soft black hats, like the parson's.

"Seems to me they takes us for a mad-'ouse more than what we are," said one of the old men.

"Sooner they did," said another, older still, in a gruff voice.

"That's 'cos you're used to killin' Roossians in the Crimea War, Mr Pierce," the first speaker replied, and all laughed silently, for the veteran was a little fractious sometimes.

Wasted with age, twisted into queer shapes with rheumatism, wooden-legged, half paralysed, worn out with years of toil, they crawled along the village street. It was an exciting walk. Generous publicans asked them in by twos and threes to have a glass. Some bought little screws of black tobacco with pence that the poor had given them. Others bought acid drops and peppermints, to give them a taste.

The churchyard was a great attraction, and nearly all spent a happy hour in spelling out the inscriptions and discovering the instances of good old age. "I've got one of a 'undred," squeaked an old man, stumbling over the mounds in his excitement. "Come and look 'ere! It says a 'undred and one, sure as ever I was born."

It was a creditable find, and a crowd of aged faces gathered quickly to peer at the stone. But astonishment was mute when another discovered a memorial of

a hundred and ten years' life. A fair record that was, and no mistake! They felt it would be useless to search further, as they gazed with respect upon the grass. "Why, bless my soul," said a former cab-driver, "there's no knowin' but what I might live another thirty years or more, me bein' under eighty still. A man can do a lot o' things in thirty year."

"Not you, Mr Conolly!" said another. "They was 'ealthy in them days, that's where it was. You won't live that long, don't you think it."

"Don't you be so cocksure, Mr Dickinson," said Mr Conolly, and they all laughed merrily.

"Well, well," said another suddenly; "it's a short way before most on us now. We won't talk about it."

When they got back to the field they found the women seated in little rows on chairs, but some of them had been for a walk too, though a shorter walk, as became their sex, and one was talking rapidly in a state of happy excitement. "I've met a gentlemen as knows my family what I served with before I married him standin' there," she was explaining. "Rice was my family's name—Irish they was, but Protestant, quite respectable. And this gentleman told me as Master Charlie's gone to Persia. Many's the napkin I've pinned on him, bless his little 'eart! and now he's gone to Persia."

Tea-time came, and the day began to droop. The horses were put into the brakes again. One by one the old people followed each other and mounted, like lambs into the fold. In the silence under the darkening elms, only the two old men who had been gardeners were heard disputing.

"I tell you it's larkspur," said one, pointing to an

enormous blue spiral he had stuck in his buttonhole, with some Sweet William and a rose.

"Common people may call it larkspur," replied the other, with the patience of scientific truth, "but it's own proper name is *Delpheenum*, and I know, because sixty year ago I rooted up a bed of it in mistake, and I've knowed ever since. But I'll never learn you to be a gardener, not if we lives another twenty years where we be."

"If you two gentlemen start gettin' quarrelsome, you'll spoil the treat," said the dwarf, handing round a packet of bull's-eyes, that each might take one. "And now whiles we're suckin' at these things, Mr Raikes will oblige with his celebrated recitation of the two sparrers that lived unhappy ever after."

Mr Raikes obliged with that, and many other of his boyhood's songs, for he had been a devil of a fellow, and to himself he was so still. The sun went down, the lanes were darkened, the long line of brakes drew into the city lights. Silent and sleepy, leaning against each other with grey and patient faces, the pensioners of labour rattled over the stones. A bell clanged, wide doors received them, the familiar smell came over them again, and the maddest, merriest day of all the year was done. One by one in their little beds they fell asleep.

IX

THE THIRD CIRCLE

It was Saturday night, and to English people there is always something a little voluptuous in the thought. Even the classes that never work then feel a sanctified right to relaxation.

Down the Strand the audiences were pouring out of the theatres, and one of the fashionable restaurants began to fill rapidly. Passing through wide entrance courts and down marble steps covered with crimson carpet, the men and women vanished into cloak-rooms and issued out again in undisguised splendour to face the grave managers standing ready to exclude anyone whose dress did not comply with the recognized fashion. The salon was built on two levels, with a low flight of steps between. Pillars and a glass partition further divided it, giving a sense of quiet and privacy, but revealing long vistas of faint and various lights. The chief feeling of colour was pale yellow, but this was mitigated by white marble, white paint, the white cloths on the separate tables, and the delicate greys and pinks of large square shades that hung over each electric lamp. On the higher level, near the entrance a string band played quiet music from time to time—so quiet and unobtrusive that its insignificance harmonized with the conversation rather than interrupted it. At the furthest end of the lower salon, the outer wall was of glass, so that the pale beauty of the interior was carried on into the dark, among plane

trees glimmering to the arc lamps of a broad road, and through the plane trees the water of the black river could here and there be seen, flowing under a large but waning moon.

Tables had been engaged beforehand, and as each party arrived in twos, or threes, or fours, they could read their title clear upon a long list prepared by the head waiter. Standing at the central entrance, he allotted the numbers, inexorable as a judge among the shades. Where each party was set, there it fed, for weal or woe. The hour had come, the food was ready, the napkins were opened. Supper began, and from table to table waiters in gold-braided uniforms bore the separate dishes, while the music gave out a soft but encouraging strain.

Like profound emotion, the theatre induces hunger, and though since morning light this was the fifth meal to everyone there, and the seventh to many, it was none the less welcome to all. Only three of the previous meals had been as large, and only one larger. The early tea and bread-and-butter in bed, the little something about eleven, and the afternoon tea with sandwiches and cake hardly deserved to rank as meals in comparison. But indeed the supper itself was light and simple compared to the dinner of nearly four hours earlier. Just some soup refined from oxen, fish served in a sauce of other sea things—the most delicate parts of a flock of sheep with peas, a choice of various birds and animals cold, and paper baskets filled with creams of peculiar flavours—that was all. Champagne to drink, coffee to finish; it would be hard for a chef to devise a work of art more classic in simplicity. To have offered more might have seemed a little gross, almost insolent, as though suggesting a previous insufficiency.

Rose bushes covered with blossom stood in the light and warmth of the entrance lounge beside the band, and on each of the tables was a glass vase of fresh-cut flowers—carnations, sweet peas, and other things of faint and harmonious hues. Round them sat men and women, pale or dark or red. At some tables the people were distinctive and of obvious types. A party of youths, conscious of maturity, and determined to drink life to the dregs, sat primly on their chairs and talked as they had heard their elders talk before them. A young girl in high-breasted gown, with the Greek key-pattern round the edge and golden fillets in her yellow hair, sat opposite an oldish man, dark and bald, who watched another girl at a far-off table, with simple, high-breasted gown and golden fillets in her hair. At another table sat a monstrous woman in silks, whose little green eyes glittered above her bulging cheeks. Opposite was her monstrous mate. His little eyes glittered too, and on the back of his neck the ridges of fat rose like waves. Between them ate their little daughter, fit offspring of a table d'hôte. Her pale hair was tied with a pale bow, her frock cut like a child's pinafore, and, in silence unrelieved, she ran the course that was set before her. These were personalities distinct and immediately perceived, but over the rest there hung a common resemblance such as pervades an Asiatic race or the cattle of our different counties. They were not exactly alike, and they could tell each other apart quite easily, just as the Chinese can. But in men and women could be seen the underlying type—solid, large-limbed, and large-featured. Their eyes were rather prominent, their noses high, their jaws heavy, and mouths rather like a horse's mouth. The men were early bald, the women full-figured, and at the meeting point of their dresses in front diamonds

shone. Round their necks they had wound strings of pearls or rough little lumps of pearly stuff, and even the plainest tried to win beauty by binding her hair with bands and glittering things. They talked without vivacity, and laughed under compulsion, maintaining without effort the vacant looks of leisure.

It was not an aristocratic class, neither were they professional, still less were they improper. The two girls in classic gowns might have been theatrical, but the other women were not theatrical, and no gleam of the struggle for life illumined their faces. The men had not the commercial look nor even the speculator's look. They had only the look of the unemployed, comforted by plenty. What class to call them could not be decided. They were a new race, fresh upon the world, the last product of creation—a supper class, adapted to the environment of recently developed restaurants. Three things, said the wise man, were too wonderful for him, yea, four, which he knew not—the way of the eagle, the serpent, the ship, and a man with a maid. But he might add a fifth wonder now—the way so many people have of getting two to five thousand a year.

Men, women, and girls, they ate and then they drank. They ate and drank again. But when the first pangs of hunger were soothed, and the wine set about its inscrutable business, the noise of voices rose higher. The insignificance of the music still harmonized with the human conversation as a perpetual undertone, but its continuance was drowned and forgotten. The table of youths told stories; the companions of the classic girls cast devouring looks over their glasses; the fat man and woman gasped for breath, with eyes glazed, and mouths half open; the little girl with a bow sat almost sated; the large men and women

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laughed and shouted to be heard. A mingled smell arose of flowers and powder and scents, and of living flesh and flesh that was cooked. The air grew hot with human warmth. The fragrance of coffee was added to the other smells. Men leant back heavily on their chairs. Women's eyes met theirs with comfortable repletion. The noise increased. The music swelled its sound. In perfect security the body took its ease. The satisfaction of life was near its utmost height, when suddenly half the lights went out, because the Lord's Day had begun.

There was a hush, and at some of the tables, the people stood up and began to move. One by one more lamps went out, and more again. A glimmering darkness filled the room. The arc lights on the road outside threw white gleams here and there; the plane trees became more visible through the glass, and the large but waning moon was dimly seen, blurred by rainy clouds.* The people had all risen now, and were moving among the tables, like indistinguishable ghosts. The women's dresses had turned to grey and misty film, flashing here and there as some jewel caught the distant rays. Like children in the dark, they spoke hardly above whispers, but stood for a moment as dim and uncertain forms under the light malign, and for that moment they became spirits, disembodied, and immortal, as though their creation had no beginning and their existence could never cease.

Incalculable and lamentable souls they seemed, full of unknown capacities, but already tottering on the edge of that circle in hell where cold and heavy rain falls for ever—a mingled rain of large hail and snow and black water pouring through the darkened air. There the ground stinks of putrefaction, and under the rain the spirits howl like dogs, turning first one

side to its fury and then the other. They are blind, and their bodies are but an empty semblance, inseparably commingled with the filthy downpour. Nevertheless, the Worm Cerberus, with three throats and belly wide as theirs once was, clutches and flays and tears them into shreds, while from the circle just below they may hear the god of money calling upon King Satan with obscure and inarticulate tongue. For it is the third circle they are in—the circle of the gluttonous desires.

But unconscious of peril as of immortality, the well-fed and heavy ghosts escaped gibbering up the stairs, collected their cloaks, and passed out into the city's filthy rain. In hansoms and motors they sniffed the Sabbath air with satisfaction, looking forward securely to a warm and restful night before breakfast rose again. But to hunger watching them, it was a dubious consolation to reflect that perhaps they were only mortal after all, and would never suffer a worse hell than they were suffering now.

X

BARMECIDE FEASTS

WHEN a newspaper one autumn evening displayed on its broadsheet the solitary announcement, " Burglars feast on Royal Fruit ! " what an alluring picture it called up ! Others might go splashing about in mud and rain, some of them hungry, all of them cold and wet. But inside that royal dining-room what genial warmth, what caressing light, shed from silvery lustres upon the gleaming surface of immemorial mahogany, where, in bowls and salvers and centre-pieces of solid gold, the Royal Fruit was piled with the lavish profusion of Arabia Felix ! Apples shone ruddily, their peel, no doubt, emblazoned with the royal arms, as it is emblazoned for the imperial picnics of the Tsar. Grapes flushed purple, weightier than those of Eschol, of which it needed two Israelites to carry off a bunch ; oranges were there at a dollar a dozen ; peaches, whose bloom surpassed the Merry Widow's ; melons, fat and soft as a policeman's head. To say that the board groaned would be a novelist's licence, for not a groan was heard, and all was safe and still, as round that opulent board the jolly burglars sat, for once in their lives exactly as happy as kings. " This 'ere's somethink like ! " spluttered Bill, his dear, dishonest face deep in a guinea pear. " Chuck us yer jemmy, mate, for them pavin' stones," said Charlie, after trying to crack the Brazil nuts in the hinge of the silver door. " Drive slowly twice round the pawk, and then

'ome," said Bob to the chauffeur of the Blackwall motor-'bus when at last the feast was done.

It was a dream of earthly bliss seldom realized in this work-a-day world. Those too happy burglars had enjoyed in actuality the very thing that the audiences at our theatres seek after but are compelled to enjoy only in a semblance, a figment, a fantastic projection of the brain, a Barmecide feast. Take, for example, the men and women then crowding to behold the drama, called "Sins of Society" in a southern theatre where aristocratic foot has never trod. Honourable shopmen with their wives, small manufacturers, publicans, foremen, undertakers, lodging-house keepers, clerks, and the working people—they have all gathered for their feast on royal fruit. They longed to be quit of beef, mutton, suet, and household jam; they longed to shake themselves free, just for one fleeting night, from the common round, the daily task, which was so far from furnishing all they needed to ask. For one night they would lay aside the virtue that so easily beset them and move unabashed among the vice and glamour of the very best society. They would be admitted to the intimacy of titled ladies who lose one fortune at bridge and the next on the racecourse of Paris. They would see the high-born hero in the Guards swear to save a woman's honour (concealed in a cardboard box), take off his best coat to the job, and set to work in his shirt-sleeves. They would learn how auburn duchesses walk the world, how Anglican priests may be human at a crisis, how countesses lead their lovers about a tea-party by the ear, how natural it appears to a lady of title to be received by a millionaire in running drawers and a pink dressing-gown, and how deeply engrained is virtue in an aristocratic villain, seeing he has per-

petrated all his villainy for Gwen—all for Lady Gwen.

It was our feast on royal fruit—a Barmecide feast, to be sure, for we dimly knew we were not really part of that illustrious society, and at the foot of the titled programme we were sharply brought back to the facts of our humble estate by an advertisement of Bottled Bass, where Champagne would have been more in keeping. But even the Bottled Bass was described as “supplied to the Palace of Westminster,” and who should grudge us this short relief from the sphere of our drab relations, this glimpse into fairyland, this brief satisfaction of the moth’s desire for the star?

“What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me,”

sang another poet. And here we had what we aspired to be. We should like to move in that entourage of splendid wickedness and stupendous deeds, to run the safe though deadly risks of morphia and revolvers, to relieve some poor criminal’s mind with a gift of ten thousand pounds, to wave the banner of England while the ship settles into the deep and the battalion stands with presented arms, dressed by the right, and singing “God Save the King!”

In another drama it was an equal joy to be present at a State ball in the Winter Palace and see the Tsar take his seat upon the throne in a staff cap and military greatcoat (alas! our only Imperial properties), while the adventurous heroine whirled in a solo dance before him, having concealed about her person a live bomb the size and shape of an old-fashioned cannon-ball. There is the life worth living, the kind of existence for which all of us poor drudges crave. Had that bomb but dropped, how different would have been the scene

from our even course of secure monotony ! Why should we listen to those who call us to dramas of real life ? Real life, indeed ! Have we not back-parlours of our own ? Let us rather remember the reproof of the wise essayist, when, writing of the Artificial Comedy, he said :—

“ We have been spoiled with the exclusive and all-devouring drama of common life. We carry our fireside concerns to the theatre with us. We do not go thither, like our ancestors, to escape from the pressure of reality, so much as to confirm our experience of it. We must live our toilsome lives twice over, as it was the mournful privilege of Ulysses to descend twice to the Shades.”

Well, we have certainly left the pressure of reality far enough behind us now. Upon our modern stage there is no dull similitude to life, but all is fancy, farce, and comfortable lies. So one was not surprised when a morning paper discovered that “ there are only two or three plays at the nineteen theatres open in which the wealthy classes do not monopolize the interest.” A list of fourteen theatres followed, where the characters were sometimes mere kings, princes, or dukes, but as a rule were millionaires. It is quite natural that this should be so. Serious critics, looking round for a reason, might say that it is only in well-to-do classes, free from the cares of food, warmth, or wages, that comedy has a sphere. Men and women, they say, must be well-off for comedy, though we may dip lower down for pathos, humour, or sugared sentiment. But serious critics go too far afield for explanations. The real reason is that our West-End theatres depend on the upper-middle classes, and where the working people and lower-middle classes desire a life of astonishing wickedness and glorified virtue in a setting of titles, the upper-middle classes desire

a life of luxury in a setting of gold. Wealth is their glimpse into fairyland, the star which they desire, the vision of something not themselves which makes for comfort, the royal fruit on which they long to feast. Just as soldiers take no interest in Mr Kipling's soldier tales, and the poor see nothing in Dickens, so the upper-middle classes are discontented with dramas of average income. "It is unwholesome," says George Meredith, in his "Essay on Comedy," "it is unwholesome for men and women to see themselves as they are if they are not better than they should be." The upper-middle classes, being quite aware that they are not richer than they should be, find it unwholesome to see themselves as they are. They, too, yearn for something beyond, some golden glory of a dream. It is the millionaire's life for which they yearn—the just unattainable ideal. They support their preference by appeals to Mr Bernard Shaw, who has become their apostle. With what vigour he denounces poverty, with what philosophic penetration extols the glory of wealth :—

"The crying need of the nation," he has said, "is not for better morals, cheaper bread, temperance, liberty, culture, redemption of fallen sisters and erring brothers, nor the grace, love, and fellowship of the Trinity, but simply for enough money."

Enough money ! But the millionaire is the only man who really has enough, and beside this claim to honour, how flat and commonplace are morality, liberty, culture, religion, and the other objects only mentioned by Mr Shaw to be rejected ! To adapt a line from "The Silver Box," the millionaire has got what the upper-middle classes want. As the Greeks liked to see gods and heroes on the stage, those being the kind of

persons they would wish to be themselves, so modern managers recognize the millionaire as the fittest character for our dramas. Let the dramatist, while he is about it, set his millionaires thick upon the boards, for the millionaire is the vision splendid, the sort of man theatre-goers would choose to be, the royal fruit on which they long to feast, even though, at a play, the feast is rather of a Barmecide description.

XI

HIS FIRST MUSIC HALL

"JOYLAND: Admission Free." That was the inscription Mr Clarkson, of the Education Office, read over a flaring entry in a vulgar street as he passed homeward one Tuesday evening. It was but a children's peepshow at a penny a peep, but something liberal and expansive in the announcement set Mr Clarkson thinking; as, indeed, most things did, for his mind was never unduly occupied.

"Where do *you* go for joy?" he asked his landlady abruptly, as she peered out at him in the passage, gathering the ends of her black shawl over her figure.

"Please, sir, I don't go nowheres now," she answered, "through not wishin' to demean myself. But I *have* taken amusement in bygone days."

"Swift said amusement is the happiness of people who don't think," said Mr Clarkson, going up the stairs.

"Indeed it is, sir; you're quite right," replied the landlady; "and the music 'alls is the best place to go for it, I've always heard say, more especially when you get a free seat for putting up a card in your shop window."

"It is strange how many departments of human interest remain a sealed book to me," thought Mr Clarkson, as he sat dining in solitude an hour or two later. "Music halls! Fellows used to go up from Oxford and come back talking about Jolly Nash or Maud Branscombe, or some such people. And I've

never been to a music hall in my life. I will go. I will not shut me from my kind. I will behold the innumerable laughter of the human ocean ! ”

“ What is laughter ? ” he meditated, as he went past Charing Cross. “ I dimly remember Aristotle said it was a thing that is out of time or place, but without danger. Incongruity with no risk, in short. Certainly a kind of antithesis appears to be required before the pleasant spasms which we call laughter can be produced. I think Emerson similarly defined it as the intellect’s perception of discrepancy. But no definition gives us its nature so finely as old Hobbes’s phrase about laughter as a sudden glory. It has been called a specially human faculty, and to describe man as ‘ the laughing animal ’ was once a favourite definition. But apes may be said to laugh, and I have heard of the men who grin like a dog and run about the West End. We cannot even be certain whether or not the faculty stands high among human characteristics. The negro laughs more than all mankind, and next to him, I think, the Englishman. It has been called a heavenly thing, if it comes from the heart. Yet I can hardly imagine Isaiah laughing, or Dante either.”

“ Standing room only ! ” said the man at the ticket office ; so Mr Clarkson took three shillings’ worth of standing room and entered. From floor to roof the great theatre was crammed with human beings, and from his position at the side near the stage, Mr Clarkson looked at line upon line of pinkish, whitish, yellowish faces, with little black specks for eyes and mouths, all fixed in the same direction, all tremulous not to miss a point in the distresses of a broken-down motor. The owner raged, the little boy lectured, the chauffeur maintained his calm ; passers-by displayed a mechani-

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cian's interest ; one of them struck a match on the machine, and sauntered on. Loud roared the innumerable laughter of the human ocean.

"A fine instance of incongruity without danger," cried Mr Clarkson to an intelligent youth beside him. "A very fine instance ! That's what makes people laugh."

The youth turned and looked at him, thought of asking him for a light, but asked somebody else.

The next turn was a dance, and then came acrobats, and then a "sentimental" song, and then some rapid horseplay. Mr Clarkson's spirits began to sink, and he wondered how long he could endure the luxury of human sympathy if this was to be its price. "Carlyle must have suffered something like this, that one time he went to the opera," he reflected. "But what precision is here, what delicacy of power, what infinity of pains ! And all to amuse ! If our Cabinet Ministers trained themselves to this perfection, what a nation we should be !"

He stopped to pick up a handkerchief the girl beside him had dropped, and as she smiled genially, he continued his memories of Carlyle's words to her aloud : "'From a Psalm of Asaph to a seat at a London music hall, what a road have men travelled !'"

"Oh, you've come up from the country, have you ?" said the girl sweetly. "Welcome, little stranger !"

A comedian, kneeling in front of the conductor, was teaching the audience a chorus consisting almost entirely of the words : "You, you, you !" and ending with the dozen letters of the alphabet that precede the vowel "U." The girl was so convulsed with laughter that she could hardly stand.

"Why do you laugh at that ?" asked Mr Clarkson with friendly curiosity.

"Because it's so funny!" gasped the girl.

"But why is it funny?" urged Mr Clarkson.

"Because it makes me laugh!" replied the girl, stumbling through the chorus again.

"I suspect there's cause for laughter in the mere repetition of imbecility," said Mr Clarkson. "I remember at Oxford they used to sing a rhyme about a young grandee of Spain, who always was sick in the train—not once and again, but again and again—and again, and again, and again."

"Oh, Lord! Wherever was you brought up?" cried the girl, affecting to be shocked.

But Mr Clarkson was already listening to an altercation between the comedian, now dressed as an old village dame, and a supposed fireman. The fireman was telling how he rescued a family of mother and children from a burning housetop. "Now," he cried threateningly to the old lady, "now do you call me a coward?"

"No," said the dame placidly, "you're not a coward. You're a liar." And the house roared.

"Are you any relation to the collier's dying child?" she went on.

One solitary peal of laughter went up from the standing room of the stalls. The whole house turned to see who it could possibly be. It was Mr Clarkson. It stopped abruptly, as a lark's song stops. The girl turned away to show she had no connection with him. Mr Clarkson tried hard not to look round as though in search of the offender, and consoled himself by reflecting on the fleeting fashion of laughter, how the Homeric gods laughed at deformity, and the Middle Ages at madmen, and Spanish kings at dwarfs, and African natives at dying agonies, and Americans at "Mrs Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch."

But a sudden hush had fallen on the theatre. The orchestra gave out the *motif* of a tune that Mr Clarkson had heard on street organs, and, amid a thunder of applause, another comedian entered.

"Who may *this* be?" Mr Clarkson asked of the intelligent youth.

"Go along with you!" was the youth's reply, and for about twenty minutes the whole vast audience listened and breathed together, with the concentrated adoration of one worshipper. Their eyes were fixed, their muscles rigid; they hardly dared to laugh or cheer for fear of missing a word or gesture of their hero—their bare-kneed Highlander, their drunken Scot, their wandering sailor, their mountaineer in love. When he had gone and the raging storm of delight howled for him back in vain, the intelligent youth, transfigured into a kind of ecstasy, cried with contemptuous triumph to Mr Clarkson, "What do you think of *that* now, governor?"

"I recognize an unquestionable capacity for comedy," Mr Clarkson replied. "The man is genial; he has something of the Dickens touch—something of the irresistible appeal, as when Mr Snodgrass asked Mr Winkle what made his horse go sideways, and Mr Winkle replied, 'I cannot imagine.' He is assisted also by a clear voice, a Scottish accent, and a countenance naturally solemn. One feels that, like Carlyle's 'wretched spiritual nigger,' he is capable of better things. One feels that the story about Carlini might be true of him. You remember how a Neapolitan doctor advised a patient who was suffering from terrible mental depression, to go and see Carlini and laugh it off, and how the patient replied, 'I am Carlini.' What is more, this comedian selects subjects of universal humour. Among mankind there appear to be a

few perennial jests—the drunken man, the mother-in-law, perhaps sea-sickness, the innocent lover, and a few others. ‘Not so bad,’ said the man who threw a stone at a dog and hit his mother-in-law ; the story is Greek, and has survived two thousand years of growing wisdom. So these excellent comedians to-night, though hardly perhaps of the highest comic genius, still——”

“Oh, forget it !” said the intelligent youth, breaking in ; “you’ve done nothing but talk putrid rot since you came, and you’d better shut it. Did you hear that song about the black hen as laid a white egg, and when someone said there wasn’t anything very wonderful in that, he was told :—

‘It mayn’t be very much, old chap,
But it’s more than *you* could do.’

Now, that’s what I say to you, governor : you’d best go home to bed, for this here’s a darned sight more than you could do.”

“I admit it, I admit it only too freely,” said Mr Clarkson, and with a cheerful good-night he went.

XII

“THE MARATHON”

IF poetry is the devil's wine, mankind is no teetotaller. No pledge of truth or science or utility is binding that withholds him from that drink. Matter-of-fact people may exercise their local option till they are dry as dust themselves ; mankind eludes them, and into the most prosaic of prohibition States he smuggles the bemused enchantment. His demands upon life are high, nor will he be put off by truth at any price. Let chroniclers and photographers do their worst ; let philosophers strip appearances like an onion till they reveal the thing in itself ; to mankind it is the labour of dullness lost, and he remains an artist, a poet, in the soul.

He will have it so, and especially in history there is no purging the drunkenness of his illusions. Our historians may write as badly at they can, they may dip their pens in ditchwater and quote authorities for every line ; the reality that they seek is none the barer. Do what he would, Bishop Stubbs composed epics, the very German dramatises, and if you read a parish register, before you have gone ten lines the figures of the dead are moving upon a stage. For drama is man's own contribution to the world, and he demands it everywhere.

Take the story of Pheidippides, which the scholars have been fighting about with fury. Every one knows it ; that story is the one thing every one does know for certain about Marathon and Pheidippides.

Even Browning could not make it unpopular. To be sure, it was all a lie, a pure invention, the growth of slow centuries. No contemporary ever heard of it. If Herodotus had known it, he would certainly have mentioned an instance of happiness equal to the highest he could record—the happiness of Tellus, the Athenian, who lived to see gentlemanly grandchildren and then was killed in battle and buried by the State ; or of Kleobis and Biton, the Argives, who dragged their old mother in a cart five miles uphill to service and died that night while asleep in the temple. The fate of Pheidippides resembled theirs, and was as happy ; Herodotus could not have missed the story if it had been invented in his time. It certainly had not then been heard of. Six centuries had to pass before we come upon the trace of it, and then the names are uncertain, and Lucian himself, who tells the story as we know it, calls the man Philippides. But such matters of fact, inaccuracies, and dubious origins, do not concern mankind. Here was the poetic situation, the touch of dramatic completeness, and men and women insisted that it should be true. Pheidippides met his proper death six centuries after he was dust, and he has been dying it ever since.

One would have thought the bare historic facts enough without embellishment. It was a moment of supreme need ; the Persian host had crossed the sea, it had destroyed brave Eretria on the big island within sight of the hills above Athens ; it had burnt the town and taken the survivors for slaves and concubines ; it had driven a long line of ships hard against the sacred shore of Attica, and now was encamped in barbaric swarms scarcely more than twenty miles away. That was the way the tyrants had come back before, and one of the serpent brood was there to guide them still,

having escaped the myrtled swords and the death due to tyrants. Unless help came from Sparta, where was bright Athens now ? Let Pheidippides start, a post-man by trade and always in training. Past Eleusis, past Megara and the rocks of Theseus he ran, across the isthmus where Corinth was asleep, over the pass into Argos, leaving the Lion Gate of Agamemnon on his left, over the steeper pass into Arcadia, and there, far in front, he saw the jagged peaks of Taygetus where Spartans practised war. A hundred and fifty miles he ran, and within forty-eight hours of the start he was there. He gave his message and had his answer. The Spartans were only too anxious to be of assistance ; if Athens fell, their turn would certainly come next ; but the army could not march till after the full moon ; the decencies of religion forbade it. Five days still to wait before they even started—full eight days before they could arrive, though they marched like the Furies ! What a message for Pheidippides to think of as he ran back home, had not Pan himself shouted to him climbing through Arcadia and sent his modest and helpful greeting to the city !

Moon or no moon, Athens must save herself. Alone she sent her sons to the battle, with none but gallant little Plataea to help ; ten thousand of them in all—say, one to ten, or one to twenty, who could be sure ? Then came the great day of history—the September day that saved Europe from the East and held back curled Assyrians and unalterable Medes and the heirs of Babylonish Nebuchadnezzar from the destruction of our free world. That charge over a mile of open ground, right in the enemy's face, the victory on both flanks, the slaughter on the beach, the sight of Pan, Theseus, and the Man with a Ploughshare openly fighting in the ranks ; and then the hurried march

home of panting citizens, "stepping out as fast as their feet could carry them," lest the enemy, sailing round Sunium, should be before them at the empty city (for treachery was at work, and there from Pentelikon a shield was flashing its heliograph message to the invader); the arrival just in time to hold the harbours and watch the barbaric ships turn their prows and sink one by one below the horizon eastward of Ægina; the honours paid to the dead, the great burial mound and ten columns inscribed with their glorious names for all generations to read; the satisfaction of telling the Spartans all about it when they came at last—that was the real story of Pheidippides and Marathon, just the bald historic facts, and surely it was a story good enough without addition!

But mankind wanted one touch more to complete the drama—just the one touch of necessary perfection. The governors of the city must be seated on their thrones, awaiting the news of fate. Around them is gathered the whole city, shivering with apprehension. Watchers are on the citadel, looking to the east; all eyes are fixed on the dusty track from Marathon. It is afternoon, and the anguish of suspense is hardly to be endured. Suddenly a little brown figure is seen running, running as only one man could run—our Pheidippides, who did the record to Sparta and has conversed with Pan! Life or death is upon his tongue—life or worse than death! He staggers into the city and up the street; he can spare no breath for words; right into the presence of the Archons on their thrones he staggers; he falls helpless at their feet, he gasps the two short words of joy and victory, and as he gasps he dies.

The rest of Marathon and its runner is forgotten. Only the thing that never happened is universally re-

membered, for that is the thing which the spirit of man demands, and most of the history that passes into the lives of men is of that quality, as fine as false. It is unlikely that a wolf suckled the Roman twins ; it is certain that Cæsar never hesitated at the Rubicon. The Sibyl did not burn her books ; Rome's greatest treasure did not leap into the chasm ; we cannot be sure that Henry I. never smiled again ; and Prince Hal, for certain, never lay in the Marshalsea. After Pavia, Francis did not write that all was lost but honour. At Waterloo, Cambronne did not exclaim that the Old Guard died but never surrendered, nor did Wellington give the order, " Up, Guards, and at 'em ! " Of all such things, we may say that they are too good to be true, and we may also say they are too good to be untrue. They are the only history that counts for man. Even to our myths we add mythology, and by an accident of speech Cinderella's slipper will remain eternally of glass instead of ermine, since every child knows glass to be fit though impossible.

Our poor London crowd has been much abused for its behaviour at the Stadium race—" the Marathon," as they called it in imitation of " the Derby " and " the Leger." Nasty comparisons have been made to bull-fights and gladiatorial shows. We have been called " a community at length debauched by a cheap Press pandering to all that is unrestrained and feverish." " Hysterical " and " bloodthirsty " have been the mildest reproaches thrown at us. The gentlest of our censors has deeply regretted the scene, " especially, perhaps, for one's wife and sister." Well, there was certainly nothing of Marathon about the day. The fate of the world did not depend upon who reached Shepherd's Bush first from Windsor. When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote that " after this supreme

epic " (of Dorando's arrival) " all is anti-climax," and that if he were disqualified it would, indeed, be a tragedy, we may grant that he was overdoing it a little. But still we of the London crowd are not quite so yellow as we are painted. We don't want bullfights and gladiatorial shows. We are not particularly blood-thirsty or hysterical ; we are not even entirely debauched by a cheap Press, and our wife and daughter are quite capable of looking after their own feelings. But, like the rest of mankind, we hunt the world for drama. If it is not there, we will invent it. And when the drama is there already—when the little Italian, with something of his country's glory to maintain or lose, comes staggering in and falls, and falls again, what generous heart could keep as cold as self-righteousness, what judge remain so Rhadamanthine as to refuse him aid ?

XIII

THE PAGEANT OF MEMORY

It was an ordinary English meadow, bright with July sunshine. The ground was not quite flat, but had been worn into gentle slopes by ages of rain—all the better for the horses to gallop over, thought the crowded audience seated in the first clothes of summer. A few heavy elms made a screen like the background in a theatre. Between their trunks one could trace the course of a little river beyond, and across the river rose a hill covered with a little town of villas for the comfortable, and red-brick cottages for the poor, now emptied of their folk.

Just an English country town, unromantic, unimaginative, passing prosperously through time from year to year, occupied with its daily gossip upon solid work and solid pleasures, that come and go with the sun and the daily papers, and are wiped out every evening like a child's dictation on a slate. Yet the little river bears the name that shaggy savages called it by two thousand years ago. Cæsar, "the one perfect man in history," once saw the little hill now covered with the red-brick houses, and himself observed the gentle slopes of that meadow only five years before he grasped the world. A few jags of battered wall, rising from the grass as though to continue the screen of elms, still tell of Rome. The narrow bricks in the great church tower were fired by worshippers of Vesta and Saturn. The tower itself looked much the same when

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our greatest king took his wife's body through the town, and John of Battle, having been paid £20 on account for making three of her memorials, began chipping at the stone for her cross on the high road. It looked much the same when John Ball and William Gryndcobbe here raised the eternal protest of the poor and got the usual answer in their death ; or when princes and barons went swirling round the meadows and hills on slaughter bent, and the humble inhabitants looked on with the kindly sympathy they always display in the occupations of the great and noble.

Up and down that sunny meadow, along the dykes of the British kraal, and under the archways that knew the hearse of Eleanor, strange figures were moving now—Roman soldiers on bicycles with shield and spear, knights in rustling scale armour smoking cigars, massive warrior queens giving the last touch of nature to the oak leaves that bound their Druids' ancient hair. It was memory's saints-day they were celebrating. For months past the whole town had been astir with tradition. Such a diving into histories, and hunting up of manuscripts ! Such copying of old pictures, such stencilling, stitching, cutting, and trying on, such adapting of fur rugs to the backs of shaggy Britons, such busy fame for slighted antiquarians ! Other towns had held their pageants : Bury had displayed her abbots, kings, and martyrs ; Oxford had coached up a power of learning, enough to make a history school at last, some people said. Why should not our ancient city have its pageant too ? Here the first of British martyrs was burnt, though not by the Inquisition ; here an eloquent queen rushed to battle, fought and died ; here Lord Bacon used to sit while composing Hamlet's soliloquy, as you may see on his monument in the church. Why are these things hid ?

A pageant should reveal them, unrolling in three short hours the folded scroll of fate. So, like the Preacher, all with one accord began to praise great men. Ladies fitted on head-dresses wilder than their hats ; children practised the merry dances or trotted barefoot with javelins grim ; grey-beards learnt to stalk the meadow stage ; squires and farmers deigned to don the helm, and gallop their hunters in the thundering rout of battle ; the clergy quickened their interest in the ancient Use, and came near to burying paupers with royal rites ; even those Radical and Socialist fellows—a difficult lot, inclined to sniff and crab—found such good stuff in John Ball and his Peasants' Revolt that they hid their pleasure in the show under the name of propaganda.

At last the appointed time came, and day by day the pageant of memory moved through its course on the self-same scene where the pageant of life was once enacted. There again was heard the twang of the long bow, most deadly of all weapons of death ; there again (inevitable quotation !) the drums and tramlings of three conquests passed over the dead, while chorus and spoken words and impassioned music helped the progress of years compressed to ten a minute. Such things are an endeavour vain but kindly. Vain, because time past is to us a book with seven seals, and it were a secondhand task to tell how blindly the iniquity of oblivion scattereth her poppy. Diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation :—

“ There is no antidote against the opium of time, which temporally considereth all things : our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors. Gravestones tell truth scarce forty years. Generations pass while some trees stand, and old families last not three oaks.”

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The passing of man's generations is an old tale. The withered grass, the leaves of autumn, the snows of yester year, have all supplied comparisons. They pass, waxing old as doth a garment, and as a vesture they are folded up and changed. To another mind they are like shipwrecked boys cast upon the shoals of time, whence they drop off into darkness. No deciphering of manuscripts or village graves can ever recover them. They stood upon this flying earth, we see their footsteps, we hear the thin ghost of their voices, and the touch of their hands is on the stones, but they are nowhere to be found. Even darkness holds them no more. Existence is realized only for the atom of a second, and by the end of the week the pageant, like the long history it represented, was already whelmed in "the uncomfortable night of nothing."

Yet to be remembered even for a short time is the desire of nearly all who die, and more great actions have been done for the hazard of a fair memory after death than for the security of a present fortune. The passion of memory is, indeed, doubly exercised, for it lies in the yearning of the living over the dead, and in the yearning of the dying—or as some have imagined, of the dead themselves—for those who still live on. Which of the two desires has the stronger influence—whether to be worthy of the beloved dead or to be kindly remembered by the beloved living—it would be curious to determine; but the double desire is so strong in all mankind that philosophers have conjectured from it the origin of religion. Nor can we look back upon the vanished things who laughed and cried and made love like ourselves, and whose room we now occupy, without an affection more tender and intimate than most races bestow upon their gods. One of the poets of the Peasants' Revolt that in the

pageant makes so confident an appeal to all who labour, tells of a peasant he had seen ; explaining only a word or two I copy again his well-known description :—

“ His coat was of a clout that cary was called,
His hood was full of holes and his hair out,
With his knobbed shoes clouted full thick ;
His toes started out as he the land trod,
His hose overhung his gaiters on every side,
All beslombred in fen as he the plough followed ;
Two mittens as poor made all of clouts,
The fingers were worn out and full of fen hung.
This wight waseled in the fen almost to the ankle,
Four oxen him before, that feeble were ;
Men might reckon each rib, so rueful they were.
His wife walked with him with a long goad,
In a cutted petticoat, cutted full high,
Wrapt in a winnowing sheet to ward her from the weather,
Barefoot on the ice that the blood followed.
And at the land's end lay a little crumb-bowl,
And thereon lay a little child lapped in clouts,
And twins of two years old upon another side,
And all they sang one song, that sorrow was to hear ;
They cried all one cry—a care-ful note.
The seely man sighed sore and said, ‘ Children, be still.’ ”

For a moment the dark curtain lifts, and we see the ancient dead as they lived and moved—men and women like ourselves, the men and women who begat and conceived us, the very clay of which we are kneaded. All are gone now—the oxen, the baby, the twins, the woman, and the seely man. But for such as these we still light the pale tapers of memory upon the All Saints' Days of the soul, and when we speak of all saints it is certain we include all sinners too.

XIV

THE BACKGROUND OF GLORY

IN speaking of war we use a conventional language that conceals reality as successfully as any legal convention can. Open a military history, such as Napier's, at almost any page, and you find some such sentence as this : " Nearly 50,000 men and 80 guns were disposable for offensive operations in the beginning of June." Take a received maxim of war, such as Napoleon's : " The strength of an army, like the power in mechanics, is estimated by multiplying the mass by the rapidity " ; or, " The first aim of every system of operations should undoubtedly be to destroy the active forces of the enemy." Read any text-book on strategy or tactics, and you will find it entirely occupied with abstract and colourless terms—semi-permanent positions, attenuated lines, objectives of attack, lines of communication, counter attacks, influence of artillery, danger zone, effective fire, enfilading fire, field of fire, concentration of fire, and attacks driven home.

These are the algebraic signs and formulæ of slaughter—a kind of military shorthand, invented, one must suppose, rather to save space than to obscure the underlying truth. It is a mere convention, but, like most conventions, it comes to be more thought of than the thing signified, and by aid of it people will talk of war as of a game of chess whose symbolic knights and castles are columns and cavalry brigades. To them the " 50,000 men disposable " are a vague and abstract

figure, a multiplication product, a component, the complement of a parallelogram. Granted the thing can move, can "operate," it has no more in common with mortal man than the resultant of two forces acting in a vacuum. War, on these terms, makes a charming pursuit—innocent as a field day, inevitable as a fugue, a subject well adapted for the argument of bores.

In Sir Charles Napier's account of Corunna, there is a trifling incident not even mentioned in his brother's history. He tells how he was standing by Sir John Moore when a round shot tore off the leg of a 42nd man, "who screamed horribly, and rolled about so as to excite agitation and alarm among others. The General said: 'This is nothing, my lads; keep your ranks; take that man away; my good fellow, don't make such a noise; we must bear these things better.' " So, we may hope, the good fellow stopped making such a noise; and in a few minutes Moore himself received a round shot that tore away his shoulder, and certainly he bore these things better. There is the touch that pierces the formulæ of abstractions and makes reality of disposable forces.

The third volume of the official history of the Boer War is a good type of military writing—clear, brief, and accurate. On its own lines, it could hardly be better done. It tells of various advances and operations—the great advance to Pretoria, the operations in the Western Transvaal, in the Orange River Colony, and so on. We are shown columns advancing, divisions operating, frontal movements, enveloping movements, clearings, and pursuits, so many men, so many guns, so many horses. With a good map and little blue and red flags on pins one could make quite a pretty and intelligible picture of it, and criticize the obvious mistakes of generals through all a summer's afternoon.

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It is admirably carried out, full of interest, beside, to anyone capable of delighting in the game of war. But before the minds of those who were there what a different picture rises as they read those quiet pages—a picture no more like the blue and red flags on pins than a map is like a country !

One may read, for instance, that the General made dispositions for a reconnaissance in force next day, and it is interesting to move one little red flag an eighth of an inch forward. But I remember that starlight morning, the rattle of the chains as the guns went by, the dull rumble of the wheels, the plodding tramp of fours upon a soft road, the checks, the grounding arms, the low voices of men going into action, the first streak of light that showed the long brown serpent winding over hills, the whirl of the first shell that went right through a battery horse without bursting. Or we read that "the hostile artillery was not slow in development," and behind the words I see again the great white puff of smoke from a hill-top, men falling flat for shelter, the flare of blazing orange in the middle of the street, the Kaffirs applauding as at Crystal Palace fireworks, the front of the Scottish store suddenly blown out, making one remark how jolly it was to see shops open again.

Many pages later we are told "the General had at 9 A.M. detailed a flying column to move out and make an effort to intercept the routed enemy." Move your red flag again one-eighth of an inch, but if you could only have seen that flying column!—the faces pallid and hollow, every bone visible through the skin, legs bent on the march or at the halt like a broken-kneed cab-horse's, uniforms torn and black, trousers patched with socks, feet bare. The men clung to their rifles with both arms, or carried them as women carry babies.

Every few minutes they halted to rest. Every hundred yards one fell down or dragged himself on all fours into the rocks. The artillery horses that had been kept alive struggled feebly up the road, tugging at the chains. From every side arose the stupefying smell of horses that had cheated the soup cauldrons by starvation. As you passed a man, a faint odour of perfumery told you he had been enjoying condensed horse flavoured with hair-oil in a hospital. Doubled together with dysentery, twisted with rheumatism, green with hunger, so the flying column crawled out to intercept the routed enemy.

In May 44,000 men and 203 guns were disposable for the advance to Pretoria, and we read that "on the 27th the main body crossed the Vaal." For a military history that is quite sufficient. But the words call up a vision of the ten miles of loose sand over which the heavy guns and supply waggons had to be dragged before the river was reached, where the main body crossed in just a line of print. Was more suffering ever crowded into so short a space? Ten years' bull-fighting in Spain could not make up its sum. Sixteen oxen went to a load, and twenty-two for the big guns. Knee-deep in sand they ploughed their way, the wheels often hidden to the axle. In front a Kaffir guided the span, another held the ropes upon the waggon, a third walked at the side with an enormous raw-hide whip. All yelled and screamed in the peculiar language oxen best understand. If a waggon stuck, all the Kaffirs around stood by with their whips and lashed the living hides into great lines and gashes. The oxen bellowed and groaned, writhing backwards and forwards, trying in vain to tear themselves from the yokes and the heavy chain which runs down the centre of a span. Many rolled over dead of pain and

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terror ; many lay down and let man do his worst. These were shot or poleaxed, and others took their places. But usually, when torture reached a certain pitch, the waggon moved, the purpose of strategy was accomplished, and the main body crossed the Vaal.

Since the beginning of wars it has been the same. We talk easily of Sennacherib's hosts and Persian invasions, of Alexander on the Indus, Hannibal over the Alps, or Cæsar in Gaul. We hear about hordes of Huns and Goths and Tartars, Turkish conquests, Marlborough victories, Napoleonic campaigns. Vast bodies of men are dimly seen moving like patches of cloud upon the blue. Sometimes, as in Mr Hardy's "Dynasts," "the invisible presence of the countless thousands of massed humanity makes itself felt indefinitely." Sometimes, as at the lifting of a fog, we perceive the vanished armies of the past vaguely running to and fro like hardly perceptible insects on a leaf. We classify the items, we group them into abstractions, and play their disposable forces like a draught-board game. Strategy must be studied that mankind may fight again, and military studies must be succinct. The movements of men trying to kill each other will still be operations, and the killed and wounded still be totted up as casualties. But behind this veil of useful words the "Spirit of the Pities," standing beside the "Spirit of the Years," realizes that the background of all wars is the same. There go the lines of animals, dragging and carrying, strained, tortured, and slain for purposes they cannot conceive ; and there stand the living men, the souls that are added up in columns of "strengths and casualties." They are hungry and thirsty ; they are sick with pain. At night their little fires are kindled, and they jest about the rations. They sleep with their faces to the

stars, but before the stars are pale they are roused again and given hot drink and a piece of bread to hearten them for the work now coming. This life on earth is their one sure and certain existence ; most of them like something or other, some, are in love with at least one woman, not a man among them wishes to be a casualty before evening. But they are going into action, the order to " fall in " comes ; they take a last gulp, utter a last curse, snatch up a rifle, and hurry away with the rest ; for the strength of an army, like the power in mechanics, is estimated by multiplying the mass by the rapidity.

XV

PANIC

It is strange that the most terrific phenomenon of war should derive its name from the god of gentle shepherds. Pan was but an ancient being who loved the nomad sheep, and though the evil habit of punning on his name began before the Homeric Hymns and still continues, the name only means a feeder. His very worshippers felt the difficulty of connecting that pastoral nature with the hideous rout of battle. They tried to discover the origin of his warlike functions in the awful silence which inspires a lonely wayfarer with inexplicable terror upon the mountains. They saw him flickering along the front of battle, whether invited or uninvited, that day when he chased the barbaric host bleating to their ships in Marathon bay. They gradually made of him a power dæmonic and incalculable rather than benign. But it was only a case of primitive wisdom forgotten. Those who gave to the shepherd god the attribute of panic were wiser than their town-bred descendants knew. In towns they had not lived among flocks or known how sheep are caught by the infection of fear, even when their own familiar dog barks them to the fold, or the shepherd god tends them himself with rod and staff. But should anything strange or unknown move upon the pasture, for a second all the white faces are turned one way, here and there a silly foot stamps defiance, and then fear seizes

them like one fool, and they are off in a panic of quivering tails.

Our pastoral fathers, when first they crept into Europe, knew something of "ovism," and such, they knew, is the infectious terror inspired by the shepherd god. To transfer their observation from sheep to men was but a step; for in half their battles they saw how fear spreads like a pestilence, and in half their village meetings, too. So it was, as we cannot doubt, that the word "panic" became fixed in the languages of the West, and because the Greeks kept sheep on Helicon our counsellors are said to be panic-stricken when they behave like sheep in Fleet Street.

Of panics there are many kinds, and since we live by trade rather than slaughter, the panic of poverty has grown commoner than flight. We have lately heard many accounts of the panics of loss in New York, but it is not so many years since the prudent and the poor could for themselves watch the thing in a London street as at a play. A whisper said the bank might shut its doors. There was not a ghost of truth in it, but in an hour the people came rushing to clutch what gold was left. Some came believing in the lie, some for fear the lie should cause a panic and they lose all. They clasped their bank-books, cheque books, receipts, and all they loved against their hearts. White-faced and struggling, they crammed the street, watching the fatal doors as souls from purgatory would watch the gates of heaven if the seats of the blessed were limited inside. Terror grew with numbers. How unspeakable if another entered first and took the last gold that was one's rightful due! They were kindly men—humble and sweet-tempered men and women for the most part, who would have shared a crust with the hungry. But if one who had entered that bank and

received the solid gold had returned by the same door, they could have torn him to shreds for rage. True, there was plenty of gold to go round. Even if there had not been, a panic was the surest road to ruin. But that did not matter to the white-faced, struggling crowd ; for panic possessed them.

It is the same in wars and revolutions. In Moscow, the patriots of the Black Gang were assembled by hundreds in a public square, swearing to shed their last drop of blood for the Tsar, and the last drop of his enemies' blood as well. From the balcony of Government House the governor was applauding their loyalty and courage, when a voice cried, " Students ! " and, like well-drilled troops at the word of command, the patriots shook and fled. No student was near, but, jostled by galloping sledges, slipping on ice, rolling each other in the snow, they ran, and the Governor was left applauding their courage to the skies and an empty square. Yet the Black Gang, honoured by the Tsar, was not unused to blood. Many a Jewish family had they slaughtered already, hurling the girls and babies from the windows down to the pavements. They were not unused to blood, but panic possessed them.

Or it is the turning point of a campaign, and all is going fairly well till on a sudden the blast of infection passes over the faces of the men. They look at each other and then look round. Cattle are being driven away in the distance. One or two stragglers are fluttering out of sight like autumn leaves. The men are uneasy, they begin to leave the trenches, a few limp away, pretending to be wounded, others go to help them ; more and more follow, the officers hasten to bring them back and do not return. The men who stay watch them anxiously ; they are brave, they

would stand if it were any good ; but it is absurd to stop and be killed when others are escaping. In half an hour the road is blocked with guns, waggons, horses, bullocks, and all the crowding chaos of a retreating army, mingled in confusion with villagers, bedding, goats, and cottage furniture, for the enemy is what victors always are. If only one man in ten had faced his front, the enemy dared not have approached ; but now one could slaughter sheep and men indifferently for thirty miles, since panic possessed them both.

I need not tell of the panic that seizes soldiers when some new form of death is flung among them and they scurry here and there like bewildered ants, to be steadied only by the deaths to which they are accustomed ; or of the panic at a falling stone which on a night attack will convert a line of patient battery-mules into a shrieking rout of terrified Bacchantes. Besides the panics of loss and war, there are also the suspicions and superstitions that drive men similarly mad. How many victims fell to the Popish Plot ? Or how many witches and warlocks did James I. hang and burn before a grateful people bestowed on him the title of Solomon ? The Last Judgment has been a recurrent source of panic, and the valleys of the Caucasus are still peopled with German villagers whose fathers started from the Rhine to face the Judgment in Jerusalem as the safest place, but abandoned their fears between Elbruz and Ararat. Nor is it so many years ago since that expectation of imminent judgment so wrought upon a section of England that I refused my birthday present, knowing it would be useless in hell ; and fain would I claim that present now from the heirs of Dr Cumming, whose thunders caused my fear.

One may notice that to these panics of loss, fear, suspicion, and ignorance there are reverse or opposite

moods, which we may call possessions, if they are not panics. Such was the infection that possessed Europe at the preaching of the Crusades, when even children set out by thousands together for the redemption of the Sepulchre. Such was the madness of greed that speculated with tulips in Holland, with John Law in Paris, and in London with the South Sea Company, when shares were offered in "an undertaking of great advantage, but nobody to know what it is," and in five hours the promoter was entrusted with £2000, but was afterwards seen no more. Such a reversion of panic was that madness on Salisbury Plain in 1907, when the cavalry in peace manœuvres rushed upon each other with fearless intent to kill.

And outside the common lines of panic and these queer perversions, there is yet another kind which infects many faint-hearted people now. Like common panics, it is bred of selfishness on suspicion. It contains a fear of loss, and, worse than cowardice, it even parades its fear of danger, and affects to shudder if a German battalion embarks in a tug. But the fear is not quite genuine. It is mixed with the desire of a new and dangerous sensation, just as some people like to feel their flesh creep and to make the flesh of others creep as well; or as a child enjoys the thrilling terror of the bogey-man, knowing in its heart who holds the turnip behind the sheet. Or, if the terrors of their panic are real, have they no shame that they go quavering to the world, "Two keels to one! Two keels to one!"? They dare not trust the country to meet an inexperienced rival on the sea unless their odds are two to one in battleships. They sing their "Rule, Britannia" and their "Hearts of Oak," but they think so little of our sailors that they count any German conscript worth two of the men who rule the

waves. Only on an assurance of two "Dreadnoughts" to one, they say, can they possibly sleep peacefully in their beds. If the one object of their poor panic-stricken souls is to sleep peacefully in their beds, they had better go to bed at once and leave the preservation of their slumbers to men of stronger nerve, and to the navy whose courage and capacity they alike insult. Where would they be sleeping now if Drake and Hawkins had bleated, "Two keels to one! Two keels to one!" when the Spaniard came looming up the Channel?

XVI

ENGLISHMAN BORN

THE most significant scene in General Buller's career was that 29th of January 1900, when his army was drawn up in hollow squares to hear him speak. Only three days before, a week of the hardest and most terrible fighting of the war had ended in complete failure. A series of checks and reverses had culminated in the bloody disaster of Spion Kop. Nor was this the General's first disaster. Colenso lay only some six weeks behind him, and there his men had for the first time learnt the bitter truth that a great and fully organized British Army, with Irish, Scottish, and English infantry, the best of cavalry, batteries, naval guns, army service corps, ambulance, transport, kitchens, camps and all, could be defeated. Revived by sports, food, and rest, they had swung far westward, crossed the Tugela at two main drifts and stormed the heights from which their goal of Ladysmith was actually visible only twelve to fifteen miles away. There lay the starving and hard-pressed comrades, to whose rescue they had been sent—linked battalions, well-known officers and men, whose signals for assistance they could plainly see flashing from a little hill. They were almost within touch, the great exploit had been almost accomplished. And now the army was back again, across the river on the wrong side, the heights still held by the enemy, the task still to do, the goal as far off as ever, and nothing to show for all that labour but

the loss of 1700 men. It was "As you were"—always an irritating order, and in wartime, as in love, you never are as you were.

Into the hollow squares the General rode, heavy, impenetrable, his face revealing no sign of emotion or thought of any kind, his back like a mountain side. Certainly he had reputation to support him. China had known him, and Ashanti, the Red River, Egypt, and the Soudan. Within three days' ride of this very place he had won his V.C., warring against Zulu assegais, twenty years before. But it is not past exploits that men think of at such a moment. That very day he was preparing to move them against the enemy again; they did not know where or with what design. And there he sat, impassive and unstirred, with all his failures thick upon him, probably at the moment the most criticized man in the world, and the most decried.

He began to speak. The sentences came blundering out, abrupt, disconnected, ungrammatical. He said something about thanks, and then he said something about the discovery of a key. Yes, his men had helped him to the discovery of a key! Not a soul present knew what he meant. Not a soul since has interpreted his meaning. To the whole of his army his speech was unintelligible; he might as well have been speaking in Zulu. But, unintelligible or not, that made no difference to his men. They received those halting, meaningless words with an outburst of applause such as has rewarded no orator since the world's creation. Cheer succeeded cheer: it seemed as though the cheering could never stop, and inspired with an enthusiasm of devotion unreasoning as a lover's, off the army set to lay down their lives for their General in his next great failure, which began next day.

It is impossible to make light of so amazing an influence. It is a miracle of personality, not to be explained by any catalogue of qualities. The kind of spirit upon which it acted is almost as difficult to analyse as the power itself. What is there in the British nature which induced those men to retain a confidence and affection that only increased with each disaster? I cannot recall a similar instance in the history of other peoples, yet no one who was present in Natal thought it in the least peculiar. Certainly there was the British sympathy with the man who plays a losing game—the same feeling which greets a breakdown at a concert or in a speech with round after round of applause. Buller was also assisted by the mere sound of his name, unconsciously suggesting dogged tenacity and power to all who heard it. All great leaders of men should bear characteristic and uncommon names, and most have borne them. “The Red Bull” the Boers called him, and if they pictured him moving backwards and forwards on the Tugela like a rat trying to get into a barn, it was always as “a big rat.”

His mere size counted for something, and it is doubtful if an insignificant-looking man could have so well maintained the confidence of a British force under misfortune. As “Linesman” said of him, he conveyed to the imagination something of the comfort to be derived from the sight of a big gun or a strong entrenchment. A six-inch “cow-gun”—how slowly it moves, how impassive it looks! But what impression, what moral effect, especially on its own side! In Buller his soldiers appeared to have found the very type and ideal of their nation—the kind of man that every Englishman would wish to be if fortune allowed—large, powerful, and solid of form, brave above

suspicion, silent and indifferent to eloquence, undemonstrative and unemotional, cold as ice in danger, unyielding in disaster, but under that imperturbable exterior bearing a kindly heart ; always careful of his army's comfort ; a model landlord, and treating his soldiers as he treated his tenants ; " a farmer by profession," as he used to say of himself, but converted into a general by the Providence which is always on the side of the good old English gentleman. He was a true sportsman, too, and, writing like a Master of Foxhounds, in his despatch to the War Office after the disaster at Colenso, he added the significant sentence : " My men are dispirited because they have not seen a dead Boer."

Such was the ideal that his men formed of Buller—an ideal of the Englishman in the highest. Such was the secret of his influence, and by common consent his career would have been called a triumph of character, if he had triumphed. What, then, is the meaning of the dispassionate verdict in the German Staff's Official History of the South African War? Writing of Colenso, they say the defeat was caused by the lack of sufficient force of character in the General in Command. They go on to say that after the threatened loss of Long's batteries :

" Buller was no longer a leader but merely a fellow-combatant ; no longer the General but only a battery-commander. The physically brave man had succumbed morally to the impressions of the battlefield. It was the General and not his gallant force that was defeated."

One of Napoleon's Maxims of War bears precisely on a kindred point :—

" The first qualification in a general-in-chief," he writes, " is a cool head—a head which receives just impressions and

estimates things and objects at their real value. He must not allow himself to be elated by good news or depressed by bad."

That was exactly where Buller failed. The temporary or even permanent loss of two batteries should not have involved retirement and disaster. His impressions were not just ; he did not estimate things at their real value ; he allowed himself to be depressed by bad news ; he was no longer a General, but became a fellow-combatant. He failed for want of sufficient force of character ; and the fatal muddle of Spion Kop, when he refused to take over the command from Sir Charles Warren, was due to just the same two causes—to lack of character and lack of coolness. The same deficiencies were revealed in that helio message to Sir George White suggesting that he should fire away his ammunition in Ladysmith and make the best terms he could—a message which might have involved the whole Empire in irretrievable disaster. Finally, the same deficiencies were seen in that unhappy speech in Westminster, which led to his removal from the army.

Was, then, Buller's reputation a myth ? Was he only an imposing mask, built like a typical Englishman, but devoid of just those qualities of coolness and character which we delight to regard as typically English ? The record of his previous career, the testimony of the Boers that no other General in the war had so tough a task as that which he ultimately performed, the assurance and success of his subsequent movement through Northern Natal and the Transvaal to Spitz Kop, forbid us to think so. Now that he is dead, and has left a name, I would only notice that many Englishmen suffer from similar weaknesses, seeming to thwart just those very qualities which we

like to claim. We are perhaps rightly called the best captains in the world ; but why is it that our generals so often fail ? At the moment of crisis they break down ; they have not enough character to grasp the splendid resolve called for by supreme command. May it be due to the worship of tradition and " good form " in our public schools, the horror with which all English boys and English society regard anything unusual or extraordinary, their contempt for intellect and work, their repugnance to ideas ? We all feel it. Our word " egregious " properly means " distinguished from a flock of sheep " ; but we love the sheep, and hate the distinction, and so we talk of an egregious fool, but never of an egregious hero. Yet it is exactly the egregious hero whom we want as general in a moment of stress.

So it is with coolness. We are naturally an emotional, a rather impressionable race, but we are trained to die rather than show our feelings. Joy, sorrow, pain, affection must never be expressed ; they fade in atrophy or remain secretly boiling like underground geysers. We suffer from suppressed emotionalism, and so it happens that in many natures like Buller's we are deceived. We trust ourselves to that solid and chilly surface. The crisis comes, and where is solidity, where is coolness ? Disconcerting as an earthquake, incalculable as a spout of molten lava, is the change.

XVII

THE DEAD MARCH

THE Volunteer was forty-five years old when he passed away on March 31st 1908 as the clock struck midnight. Only forty-five he was, by regulation, and his father's name was Fencible. It seemed impossible that all we knew of him could have been crowded into those few years—less than two generations, not time enough to allow him to win his long-service medal twice over. Yet we could have wished him no fitter demise. Cut off in his prime, he fell with harness on his back. At his obsequies drums were heard, and funeral notes ; many soldiers discharged their farewell shots, nor did an enemy, with sullen firing, disturb the sad festivity of the scene. In conformity with his career, his end was martial peace.

That " Last Post," how sad and sweet it is, whether it sounds over lonely graves soon to be indistinguishable, or warns the canteen of bedtime ! " Good-night, good-night ! " it cries. " Sleep well in the grave—sleep ! " Or else, like the blue-water school when the fleet is at three-Power standard, it says, " Sleep well in your beds." To the Volunteer that Tuesday night it said both, and, after the burial of his name, the man went home to slumber. I would not speak without respect of anything that is past. One remembers those verses in the " Daily Chronicle " that first drew attention to Mr Edgar Wallace's art ten years ago. The thing was called " Ginger James,"

and it told how an insignificant and rather worthless private suddenly came to be honoured by all the regiment. His comrades saluted him, the colonel took off his hat, the guard stood at the Present, he rode in a carriage, and his travelling rug was the Union Jack, when he drove away to a rather slow selection from a piece that is known as "Saul." And all this for nothing he had done. So with the Volunteer. He was alive, and is dead. The War Office made him : let him pass for a soldier.

Before he had been dead and buried four nights, we began to think of him with regretful tenderness, and fond memory brought the light of other days around him. We saw him as he first appeared, in hard, high cap, with flat, projecting peak, and a little ball or plume of cock-feathers at the top. That was the time when his officers wore long pointed whiskers that waved over their shoulder-straps in the breeze, and his youthful courage was maintained by assurances that he would be sent out of England only in case of invasion. It was the time of Ritualistic movements, when the defaulting Volunteer pledged himself to come to drill in Lent. It was then that he got his rifle mixed up in the wheels of his omnibus, and could not imagine where to hide the unsightly ribbon of wood and iron that came out. Then that, mistaking the wooden Highlander in front of a tobacconist shop for one of the London Scottish, he called him "poshtively a dishgrache to the serviche." Then that, being discovered by his adjutant asleep among the furze-bushes on Wimbledon Common while a field-day was raging, he explained that he had been a Volunteer quite recently, but had just resigned, "owing to tempry indishposition."

"Punch" was then his record, his chronicle, and

service-sheet. "Dress up, indeed!" he retorted to his sergeant-major. "Confound you, I'm better dressed than you are!" And once he had to display obedience to the direction, "Has you were! 'Alt! Mark time! The 'ole will bear in mind that my word of command is merely a Caution." Or he imbibed the instruction, "When I says Fix, mind you baint to fix, but when I says Baynets, whip 'em out smart." The brave days of Wimbledon faded away like youth, but still something of the old spirit remained, and it was in actual camp at Aldershot that the Volunteer put the guard-tent prisoner on sentry-go while he went for a walk with his girl. It was at Aldershot that he fired at a rook with a round stone and a blank cartridge, and both he and the rook survived.

We owe a great deal to one who added so much to the gaiety of the nation, nor will we lightly talk of the spirit that is gone. Looking at him as he lived, I have often marvelled at his humility and devotion. The thing may not have been particularly well done; the wonder was it should be done at all. Some, as we know, attributed the Volunteer's zeal to a form of snobbery—to a delight in fine clothes and sounding titles—to a sense of rank and command—to a passion for mess-tent revelry. There was, perhaps, no great harm in liking to be decently dressed once a month, or even once a week, but people who said these things never knew the Volunteer from inside. They never knew the Regular's scorn, the Militiaman's contumely. They never knew what it was to be a Volunteer officer and see a private in the Foot Guards turn about and walk in the opposite direction rather than salute, or to hear soldiers three discussing whether to salute, and deciding not. They never knew what it was to hold an advance party together for pitching camp in

rain and wind, or to be summoned at daybreak to see that the fat on the raw sides of ration flesh was of a wholesome hue. They never knew the mess-tent revelry of sopping grass and puddled clay, of stinking stoves and lukewarm soup.

It could not have been snobbery that made the Volunteer. There was no social pride in being called a "mutton-slayer," or even a "Saturday soldier." There was no undue distinction in the glance that observed the silver buttons, nor in the sniff that went by. The cause remains something of a mystery; it was so easy not to be a Volunteer, yet so many were. Something savage, we suppose, was mingled in their blood—the touch that makes a box of soldiers so welcome to a boy, or that drives people to tour in gipsy-vans far from their desirable residences. Some natures also are born to obey; they enjoy the decisiveness of commands, the relief from hesitation, the comfort when only obedience is required. Others sought comradeship—the true and only society in a common cause. These may have been among the reasons why the Volunteer existed. The defence of the country has also been alleged.

But, whatever his reasons for existing may have been, there is no question as to the Volunteer's influence upon our physical and intellectual condition. The movement started at about 160,000 strong, and it put on about 100,000 more before it was done. It was something to have that considerable number of young men engaged in definite exercises week by week for all those years. It was more that their thoughts should be diverted from the backyard and street to wider interests and subjects attractive to military minds—the reform of the War Office, foreign relations, or the lessons they could draw from Napoleonic

campaigns. One of the Volunteers, by nature himself Napoleonic, by destiny a banker's clerk, was lying out with his company upon an African hillside. Being under cover for the moment, I asked him what he thought of active service, and he replied, "I think it has extended our horizons." A few minutes later the scope of his horizon was again extended, for he was dead.

That is, perhaps, the best thing to remember when we recall the episode of the Volunteers in our history. Of their military value it is impossible to judge, for it was never tested, and the hottest field-day is not in the least like war. Indeed, the only danger of the movement lay in accustoming men to think that war would not be very different. But, allowing for all the seriousness of this danger, we may still say that for several hundreds of thousands the movement widened an horizon otherwise narrow, and when ridicule has said its worst, still that is something to boast of. To take the dear old Volunteer's place, we have now received "Territorials," with County Associations, converted artillery, 168 battalions formed into 14 divisions, and one knows not what beside. But in burying our Volunteer, there was no need to think bitterly of the morrow. One of the characteristic things about the funeral was that we were not sure whether he had really died, or whether, like the evening and the morning star, it was only his name that had changed.

XVIII

“THE COAST”

THERE is an attraction in the very worst, a beauty in the Valley of Tophet. You may more easily find a life devoted to lepers than to the wholesome, and one who has lived on the West Coast has always a yearning to return. Nature has there said, “Look, I will display all my powers of evil. I will do the worst I can. I will give querulous mankind something to whine about. I will silence the silliness that prattles of a beautiful world.” Then she took stinking slime and for hundreds of miles she laid down the mangrove swamps that never dry, and covered them with deadly growths that rot under their own darkness. The sea that washes the grey roots with its tides she filled with sharks, and in unmeasured miles of ooze she crowded mud-fish that run like lizards, and colourless crabs, and long worms with innumerable feet, and pale slugs, and crocodiles with eyes like stones. Where the slime at last ended, and a man might stand without sinking to the waist, she set a forest impenetrable to the sun and air, and bound the trunks together into a solid tangle of spikes and thorns and suckers.

In this forest she put deadly serpents and envenomed spiders, obscene reptiles, and scorpions as large as a woman's foot. Then, over swamp and forest alike, she blew dense clouds of flies and every kind of poisonous insect—the fever gnat, the gnat that gives blackwater, compared to which fever counts as health, the speck of

life that makes a man swell like a bulbous tree, and the speck that sends him to the grave by a few months' sleep through madness. Savage ants also to tear his flesh as with red-hot pincers she poured upon the land in countless hordes, and ticks to suck his blood, and crawl-crawl to drive him frantic, and, in the sandy places, many millions of jiggers to burrow into his toes and rot them away.

Having thus prepared a place for man's habitation, she brought the sun to blaze sheer down upon it for half the year, and for the other half she soused it in perpetual and violent rain. All the year round she kept it moist, whelmed in a hot mist that could be felt, and stank of rottenness a hundred miles to sea. She lashed it with tempests as with a whip, and with tornadoes she licked up the giant trees as a cow licks grass. With the sword of lightning she pierced the very blanket of the swamp, that she might strike the cowering brood of man, and if for a while the leaves of the forest dried, she burnt the land with fire, consuming in its destruction the little huts that men and women had woven to shelter themselves and their young.

There, no prospect pleases, and man is far viler than in Ceylon's balmy isle. What perversity, then, filled me with longing as I read a book, called "The Palm-Oil Ruffian," by Anthony Hamilton? As a novel it had no particular merit. It showed no insight into character, and its one "stirring event" was just the least interesting part. It was simply an account of a trader's life on the Coast, and the trader's only distinction is that he went in for rubber instead of palm oil, like most of the traders I have known. But the account was so exact and intimate that as I read I longed to be lying out once more in the shade of a "factory" on a "beach." I longed for the taste of

foo-foo, sap-sap, or paw-paw, with just a squeeze of lime, and for the rich smell of "palm-oll chop." The river, pouring its huge stream between black islands of swamp, flows past like oil itself. From far away comes the boom of a gun, warning the distant creeks that an Elder-Dempster boat has arrived with letters and papers from home, only three weeks old. The boys have just stopped rolling the casks of oil and bags of kernels, and over all hangs the peculiar sweetish fragrance of the palm. Black forms pad silently about or lie stretched in sleep. "Hey, James," someone calls, "you lib for bring dat chop?" "Hey massa," answers a voice from an outside kitchen; "I lib for bring one time."

Or else I longed to see the low red cliff of Accrá looming up from the misty sea, and to hear the splash of the twenty paddles and the loud hiss of the natives to keep the time, as, standing up side by side, with faces to the bow, they drive the great surf-boat to the gangway steps, and the official in the stern tells us who is dead since last we heard. And I longed to feel the boat rise and fall through the surf again, to see the world vanish and reappear as the great waves roll us in, to know again the crash of the bows upon the shore and hear the roar of the water rushing back and trying to suck us with it; to feel the "branch boat" go bumping over Lagos bar among the tormented foam; to dine with the officers on "the Hill" at Calabar; to be carried up in a hammock because the little walk would drench my clothes with sweat; to find a mess where canvas shirts and collars are regulation; to go down again among the "palm-oil ruffians" of the bank and see them talking or gambling in "singlets" and white trousers, while from darkened rooms and corners almost invisible figures crouching in blue

cotton cloths watch them with spaniel eyes ; to land once more upon a lonely " beach " between poisonous swamp and steaming sea, where a solitary white man spends his life rejoicing to have escaped from the gaieties of his native France to a land where " there are no Commandments—no, not one." Hey, I fit go catch we country one time ! Hey, dat is fine too much!

It is curious. In all the world there can hardly be a life more unwholesome, more enervating and monotonous, and one would almost say more degrading than the life of an " agent " on " the Rivers." In a few months his face begins to look pale and streaky from impoverished blood ; hardly a week passes without fever of some sort ; before he gets away for his first leave home his memory has probably begun to shake and his conversation is uncertain. Day and night he sweats continually. If he lies naked on the bare floor the boards are wet to his shape when he gets up. Thirst never leaves him for more than half an hour. Probably he has no equal society but a distant agent or two far away up the creeks. He has no companion but the negro girl whom he has hired from her mother or her chief for £5 and a " dash," and who bears him yellow-wooled, grey-eyed negroids for the missionaries to struggle with in their schools. The labour with the oil and kernel is almost ceaseless. Sometimes he looks after a store as well. Isolation, the absence of a standard, and the depression of fever begin slowly to eat away his nature. Ten to one, after a year or so, he does things he would not have done before. Probably he shoots birds sitting, just for the sake of slaughter. (It is noticeable that Mr Anthony Hamilton introduces an instance of this tendency, which I have often observed myself.) Very likely he begins to kick or flog his natives. Often he finds his only mental

interest in extreme sensuality. I have known a trader on the Rivers who solaced his leisure only by books which made the worst of modern novels seem fit for Sunday School prizes. Yet to this life nearly all who have known it will long to return, at the risk of their health, their brains, and their immortal souls.

Mahogany, gold, a little cotton, less rubber, and one or two other things come in, but in the main it is a matter of soap and candles. It is for the palm-oil that we hold the Coast and the Rivers, and count mangrove swamps among the assets of our Empire. For soap and candles we send traders to their peculiar doom, and District Commissioners to look down upon the traders, and officers to look down upon the District Commissioners. For soap and candles we take the natives in hand and instruct the inscrutable children of the forest in the useless knowledge of our Board Schools. For this we induce the Kroo boys of Liberia to migrate to and fro with the variegated boxes they love, and encourage the native women to put to sea with a luggage more useful than polite. For this we send out a punitive expedition when the weather cools, and propagate true religion by smashing up a juju. Soap and candles cost something besides the pence. Are they worth the extra dash? Who fit to savvy? Dat no good for we palaver. I tink more better we go for catch dilly sleep one time.

XIX

“IN HIS BLINDNESS”

AT Islington, in the midst of streets and other surroundings which one hopes no poor heathen visitor regarded as the finest flower of Christianity, there was on view an exhibition of mankind's efforts to comprehend the divine. It was called “The Orient,” but was not specially Oriental, though the United States and most of the Western Hemisphere were excluded—I suppose as being already permeated by the same religious spirit that we may observe among ourselves and in the rest of Europe. On account of this familiarity, the London Missionary Society, which organized the exhibition, omitted representations of the religious forms that are considered the highest, but in other respects the development of the religious sense in man's various races and stages could be followed very completely. We were shown examples of almost every kind of worship, from savage belief, which sees spirit in almost everything, up to the Positivist forms, which can discover spirit almost nowhere. And the first thing one noticed about all these varying attempts at religion was that they were not strictly historic in point of date, but at this moment co-exist upon the world's surface, as though to present us with the long history of man's thought in visible summary.

One form of religion does not necessarily lead to another, and there is no reason to suppose that, if left to himself, the Ju-ju worshipper in his swamps

would ever conceive the Allah of Mahomet. It appears that nothing is so slow to change as the religion of a race, and having once reached a certain stage of ritual, it abides. Unless some entirely different religion is imposed upon it, the race itself will change or disappear more quickly. There is the difficulty of treating religion as history, for we have no assurance that any particular worship has passed through previous stages like the religions we see around us to-day. We can but vaguely place them in the order that seems to us most natural, and suppose that in the unrecorded ages of the past some few races of men have slowly risen from the worship of strange powers in stones or crocodiles up to the worship of an invisible but ever-present spirit, while other races of men remain prostrate before stones and crocodiles, seeking no more. The exhibition did not reveal the past history of religion so much as the present diversity of man's own spirit, and how rarely it cares to change.

The power in the stone, the filmy soul lurking in all things visible, the mysterious human bond of totem in emu or fish, the guardian angel in a greasy rag, the living or even imaginary frog that, hoisted on a pole, will awe a countryside—certainly these show diversity enough, no matter to what primitive stage of man you turn. The Zulu, who doubts of God, likes to have the snake of his father's soul curled upon his roof. Foxes, bears, and trees find worshippers, toys are dowered with mortality, and Juggernaut is put to bed. I have seen the Chibokwe woman spread meal before her wooden bird that her childbirth may be eased; her husband stripes a toy canoe with red and black to please the fishing-spirit. Powers of evil must have their due; the goddess of Indian cholera receives her offering; and the smallpox image her coat of vermilion daub.

For luck or vengeance the Congo man drives nails thick as quills upon a porcupine into his wooden god, lovers thrust pins into inhuman hearts, and Sister Helen melts her waxen man. Medicine men cry aloud for rain, and snuff crime upon the air as a dog smells blood. All night dark forms are now dancing in the moon, while the drum throbs to ecstasy, and antelope skulls glimmer upon their circle of sticks. Every morning in a million households Shiva beside his patient bull receives the offering of water, rice, and a green leaf or two, Vishnu's footprint is painted anew upon the forehead of his own, the schoolboy prays to the elephant god for wisdom in his examination, and Kali, dumfounded at her husband's sacrifice, mercifully checks her carnage. In China the praying wheels are spinning round; the burning prayers ascend to the sky, mingling their smoke with burning gods; every day millions of her people wake to accept three contradictory religions, and once a year her Emperor mounts the triple Altar of Heaven and prostrates himself before the universe, alone in upper air.

What is it that perpetually drives mankind to such strange observances? What built Stonehenge, and fills the circles of our grass with elves and Little People? Or what set the Virgin's temple on the Acropolis, and heard the god's voice at Delphi, established Jove at the heart of empire, and secluded Mecca's black stone from unbelievers? It has been thought that the love of the dead sufficed, and that gods are but ghosts in the glory of recollection. No people in the world are so stony as to believe that the dead can die. In every land some All Saints' Day celebrates the passion of an inextinguishable yearning; the Chinaman launches his lantern on the water; the Hindu kindles the tiny

lamps of Diwali along his window sills and threshold ; the Christian lights his taper at the grave. Nor is it an unnatural study to peruse the sacred tablets of our parents' records, and to idealize the qualities that, having given us birth, became incorporate in our persons. Yet this passion in itself, strong though it is, can hardly support the full weight of man's religion. For the virtue of uncles fades like their sin, and, except for lords and Chinamen, few of us can penetrate beyond three generations of our ancestry.

The hope of our future reward, and of the retribution of others, is also named as an incentive to religious belief. When retribution on one scandalous occasion failed beyond the tomb, "who," cried the epigrammatist, "can now believe in gods?" And, certainly, there was consolation for humanity in this exhibition's pictures of the Buddhist hell, where greedy officials are clapped into cages, and incompetent doctors suffocate in choking sand, and those who disestablish churches squat ill at ease upon mountains of spears. All wish the full arc of life somewhere to be completed, and did not an eternal justice otherwise subsist, mankind in his desire to rectify this muddle of existence might in natural course have invented it.

Yet we feel this also is but a thin and limited explanation of so profound a reality. There is a notable change come over our aspect of things, once so easily dismissed with talk of darkness and superstition. From Isaiah and Horace downward, it was a commonplace to sneer at the poor idol-maker who warmed himself with one half of the log and of the other made a god. That sneer is obsolete now—as obsolete as the condemnation of "the heathen" in vague, black lumps and parcels of humanity predestined to blindness and destruction. In that fetish of greasy rag, or that

staring idol with protruded tongue, we no longer denounce the work of the Evil One, but behind the hideousness and absurdity we perceive some pitiful attempt of the human soul to express something beyond itself, some idea for which it can find no adequate expression in form, something which it can hardly yet conceive even in thought. To fix this idea, to present it more clearly before herself, the soul must be content with that symbol, however hideous and absurd. It is the idea that counts—the search for something not to be found within the world's flaming walls. "Behold, I go forward," said Job, "but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him." The Luvale Bantu searching for his symbol of the spirit is in like case. "Lift the stone, and thou shalt find me," answers the new-found Logion; "cleave the wood, and there I am." It is always the same search, always a foreboding of spiritual power not far removed, a haunting belief that all these transitory things are but symbols of a glory that may possibly be revealed.

If we must search for the origins of religion, whether childlike, grotesque, or ennobling, it is here we should look for them—here in the dim region where Wordsworth found,

"Those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized."

It is a recognition of these faint origins, with all the pathos of their failure, and all the splendour of the distinction they confer upon man, which has produced so remarkable a change in our attitude towards religious

forms, and even in our missionary methods. When a missionary doctor now finds a medicine man plastering a fever patient with chewed leaves, painting him with red ochre, and spitting a preparation of maize and ashes into the nose and mouth, he no longer calls him fool or murderer ; but he says, " You are doing your best, and yet perhaps I know a better way." And if anyone knows a better way among the obstinate mysteries of the spirit, it is thus he will teach it now.

XX

THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE

THE more we know about a race the less we generalize, and if you want to discover the English character, you must stand at Charing Cross and ask the foreign travellers fresh from the Channel. With each succeeding day in our country they will tell you less. Inquire what the Russians are like from a week-end tourist in St Petersburg, and he will reel you off a magazine article of qualities ; ask a seven years' resident, and he is dumb. The crowding cases of diversity have blinded him to general truth, and it is the fresh eye that sees the clearest. It may not be so with philosophers ; those freaks of wisdom are believed to go on piling up fact upon fact, instance upon instance, in the hope of saying something of value before they die. But ordinary people start with their generalization, and leave it further and further behind them the longer they live and the more they learn.

That is why it is impossible to obey the old precept and know oneself. There is nothing we have known so long as ourselves, and that long familiarity has spoilt our chance of ever knowing what we are. How readily we sum up an acquaintance of yesterday ! But we seldom characterize an old friend, and when it comes to characterizing that oldest friend of all, who has been so long the intimate guest of our body, we find in him such a host of contradictions, variations, and possibilities that we refuse to proceed. We are dumfounded

by the immensity of the task, and the ready summaries of our acquaintances rather annoy us, even when they are flattering. A Shrewsbury boy delineated the very soul of two of the masters on a wall. One of them pointed out the picture of the other with grateful appreciation, but turning to his own image he said, "I cannot think whom this strange figure may represent."

A quick generalization is the power of the caricaturist. None of us have seen an Englishman like John Bull, but he stands for England. We are not aware that Englishwomen have long teeth and longer feet, but the French are. No Irishman sees his countrymen brandishing sticks and shouting "Begorrah!" No German adores the Fatherland as the home of a tubby student with a pipe and a pot of beer. I doubt if even Mr Chamberlain knew what a Brer Fox he would make till the "Westminster Gazette" showed him, and Mr Gladstone was never conscious of his dynamic collars. Excess of knowledge puzzles the view, and custom comes in to complete the blindness. "Let the sun rise twice," said the wise man, "and we cease to wonder." We do not only cease to wonder, we cease to look. What is habitual is never seen, and there is nothing so habitual as ourselves.

That is why the most penetrating books on countries and peoples are always written by foreigners. "Nothing is commonplace as seen for the first time," wrote Lafcadio Hearn, whose "Letters from the Raven" have appeared as an addition to the much more valuable collection of his letters published in the previous year. In the new volume there is little of personal interest. They are not particularly good letters, and most of them were written long before

Lafcadio Hearn discovered his true power in life. Indeed, their only importance is the assurance they give us of his purely literary cast of mind from youth—the cast of mind which induced him to preserve his own old love-letters when they were returned to him, because he recognized literary excellence in their style. Still, they do, at all events, contain one sentence which is worth preserving. He calls it a quotation from the Talmud :

“ There are three whose life is no life : the Sympathetic man, the Irascible, and the Melancholy.”

Probably Hearn meant to include himself among the Melancholy in his lamentation, and he was melancholy. But it is as the Sympathetic man that he interests us now, just as it is the mention of the class Sympathetic that gives its interest to the Talmud text.

Place the Sympathetic man as a stranger in a foreign land, and you get some chance of hearing what the land is like. Place the lady who calls herself Pierre de Coulevain in a London suburb or a country house, and you get a portrait of the English educated classes beyond the power of the Englishman to draw. Place Miss Margaret Noble in a Calcutta slum, let her call herself Sister Nivedita, and in her “ Web of Indian Life ” you will see the heart of Hinduism revealed as no official with ten languages on his tongue and the Statistical Abstract in his pocket has ever revealed it. Place Mr Fielding Hall on the Irawaddy, and the soul of the Burmese people will pervade the air of literature like a perfume full of memories.

But no one has been a better instance of these powers than Lafcadio Hearn himself. That delicate mixture of Greek and Irish blood, humanised by the scrappy, happy-go-lucky training of American struggle,

which did not encrust his sympathies with the hard coating of uniformity such as an English public school deposits round the natural heart—that was exactly the right sort of nature for the task which he happily found. He found it late, by accident, as it were. I believe he was over forty before he set about it, and he was not much over fifty when he died. But in those few years, in those few little books of his, he drew a picture of the Japanese soul such as no one else has drawn. Hardly any names are mentioned, hardly any places are described; no account is taken of the sights that occupy most books of travel. Quite ordinary things are spoken of—the evening walk in spring, the fisherman's prayers, the singing insects in their cages, the fairy stories, the nursery rhymes, the uses of a woman's sleeve. But in these common things the quintessence of a people's soul is caught, just as one painter in a generation will sometimes catch the quintessence of a face or of a landscape's mood. We find in him, almost to perfection, that gift of delicate realization with which Pierre Loti is often credited; falsely credited I think, for Pierre Loti's most subtle visions are nearly always tinged with conceit and personal desire, so that when they have passed before you in turn, you feel that you have been watching a magic-lantern of the various ways in which Pierre Loti, of the French Navy and Academy, has made love to women of many different colours.

As so often happens, Lafcadio Hearn seems to have come only just in time before the soul he drew faded into another incarnation. Probably he knew that the spiritual colours of his picture were already vanishing. To an eye like his they may still be there, but since the first revelation

in his books the soul of Japan has turned a new aspect towards the outer world, and in contrast to the clash of ships and the rows of devoted dead outside the ramparts, the dainty manners that Hearn described so well are beginning to look a little precious, a little finikin. When a Japanese ship was reported in the Thames a few years ago, people went down to the docks expecting to see a scarlet junk with a golden mast, and a dragon's tail for rudder. But they found an ordinary Glasgow steamer, with nothing Japanese about her except the crew and the teacups. That kind of shock we feel when we turn from Lafcadio Hearn's chapter on dragon-flies to the arsenals of Yokohama, or wherever the arsenals are.

Let us not be shocked, but rather marvel at the race which can equally well construct a battleship and cram into the regulation fifteen syllables of a complete poem all the suggested emotion that the Japanese poetess put into a lament for her dead son while she watched the other children at play in the season of dragon-flies :

“ Catching the dragon-flies !
—I wonder where
He has gone to-day ! ”

It is commonly said of Hearn that in his books he created a Japan such as never was, on land or sea. If so, it was greatly to his credit. But that kind of criticism need never trouble us. Dull people raise the same objection against Sister Nivedita and Mr Fielding Hall. They raised the same objection to Turner's pictures, and his well-worn answer is still sufficient for them all : “ You say you never saw a sunset like that, madam ? Don't you wish you

could ! ” And as to the value of Hearn’s work and its estimation in Japan itself, let us remember the words of a famous Japanese poet on hearing the news of his death : “ Surely we could have better lost two or three battleships.”

XXI

AN EARTHY PARADISE

“ To England God has given the dominion of the sea, to France the dominion of the land, to Germany of the air.” How amazing the irony of Jean Paul’s boast appears to us now ! It is barely a century since he uttered it. The words take us back to that dear land of aerial contemplation, where philosophers in high-pitched attics brooded day and night over the Thing in Itself, where poets wrote each other stout volumes of letters on the metaphysic of nursery rhymes, where youths haunted moonlit ruins with romantic shudders, and maidens with languishing eyes sought the Blue Flower of intangible passion. There stood the little villages with brown-tiled roofs and wooden rafters. Round them confidingly clustered the forests of formal little trees, like the curly firs in oval boxes of toy farmyards. There walked the goats and cows, whose horns get entangled in the curly branches ; there laboured the men and women, meek and peaceful as their toy similitudes ; and there the friendly stork brought the babies over the snow.

Hardly a century has gone, and what a different Germany it is that makes the flesh of the “ National Review ” to creep, and holds the members of the Navy League awake and trembling through the night watches ! Out of that visionary dominator of the air has grown a ravening monster, who grips the land and threatens the sea, whose mailed teeth crunch the bones

of men from China to the Cameroons, whose iron crest, looming upon our Eastern offing, surpasses the summer serpent in perpetuated and recurrent terror. In place of the sighing of wind upon the forest and the fevered brow, we hear the trampling of two million solid men in arms. In place of the languishing eyes that sought the Blue Flower we behold the searchlights of a hundred "Dreadnoughts" seeking a blue estuary where they may vomit their accursed spawn upon our holy shores. Thou hast conquered, O man of blood and iron! From the dominion of the air this is progress indeed.

It is not with poor Mr Maxse's nightmare that Mrs Alfred Sidgwick deals in her large but pleasant book upon "Home Life in Germany." Here she is concerned with the lesser things of daily existence that are supposed to occupy a woman's attention more than man's. She speaks of them as the insignificant trifles that make the common round of life; and, no doubt, when a man's mind is crowded up with battleships and army corps, there is not much room for what German ladies call "the great Wash." But to us who hope to preserve some kind of sanity, even when the Kiel Canal is widened, the subject of Mrs Sidgwick's book is far from trifling or insignificant. Setting genius and spiritual things aside, we may in the household best examine the essential qualities of a race. If we were clever enough we might very likely there discover a good deal about genius and spiritual things as well. The philosopher has always been fond of saying, "Show me a man's friends, books, clothes, or something of that kind, and I will show you the man himself." We may fear that the philosopher is not the person to show us anything, but to the list of things that reveal the man or the race we may just as well add the kitchen, the bedroom, and the public-house.

It is true that German provinces differ widely in habit and temperament. In spite of uniform regulations and all the cheers for unity, the differences go on subsisting. Due to climates and past history, they are deep in the blood as nationality itself, and no race bred on wine will ever coalesce with the race of beer ; no Bavarian who has snuffed the Tyrol will claim kinship with the serf who plods East Prussian mire. The differences of manner are almost as violent, the sentiment almost as hostile and aloof, as between the four or five races that people our own islands ; and even the differences of blood are only a little less marked. Yet through them all there runs a character that we call emphatically German, and Mrs Sidgwick, being of German parentage herself, though she prefers to regard herself as an Englishwoman (" naturally," as Englishwomen would say), has been able to live in various parts of her fatherland with complete understanding, and to show us the essential habits of a common stock.

She takes us note by note through the whole gamut of life among the middle-classes and the poor. To one who has lived in a small German town, it may seem strange that she has omitted royalty and the aristocracy ; for he will remember the inexhaustible discussions on Grand Dukes and Princesses, and how shamelessly he tried to satisfy the curiosity about his personal knowledge of England's King and royal family. But for all that, the German aristocracy has less influence upon the common affairs of life than our own, and Mrs Sidgwick is right in keeping most of her book for the people of " moderate incomes," the small professional households, the " educated classes," among whom, in all civilized nations, the special characteristics of a race are most easily seen. So she takes us through the whole thing—the common

experience of this class between birth and death—from the baby in its “cushion,” through the stages of boy and girl, student and “Backfisch,” man and wife, servants, shopping, family meals, games, arts, watering-places, and beer, up to the apotheosis of a desirable residence in Berlin. It is a major scale, and it ends satisfactorily with a common chord. There is something direct, orderly, and healthy—what the Germans call *kerngesund*—about it all. On the whole, Germany would have a right to pride herself, even if she did not so frequently take the right. She has aimed at certain results and gained them.

To put it quite grossly, I think the German of the middle and lower-middle classes gets more for his money than the Englishman of the same standing. As far as mere knowledge goes, he gets a better education. His health is more scientifically watched, his body more scientifically developed. When he marries, his home is more comfortable, his wants more carefully attended to, his cheap cigars superior. He gets goose more often for dinner, and he gets other sauces than the paste called “melted butter.” His clothes are always mended, and usually clean; so are his children’s. His wife is servicable, admiring, quietly affectionate, and so thrifty that she pockets the sugar for him at a café. His being is pervaded by a kind of spiritual *Gemüthlichkeit*. From childhood to old age he can drink beer with safety and economy, and for the price of a glass in an artificial garden can have excellent music thrown in. At any of the numerous small capitals and university towns he can count on a good library and a theatre where classic masterpieces and modern experiments are to be seen for next to nothing in quick succession. Once a year he can take a “cure” in earth, air, water, sun, mud, odours, or any other

element he chooses. And when at last he can keep alive no more, all his relations and friends will express their deep-hearted lamentations by an advertisement in the local paper half a column long.

One cannot do all that in England at the price. We are not speaking of the poor or even of the artisan classes ; but in spite of her growing riches and rising standard of life, Germany is still the Paradise of moderate means. She is a Paradise, too, in which it is almost impossible to go wrong. As in her own forests, there are guide-posts at every turn, and different coloured stripes are painted on the trees guiding you in accordance with pre-arranged directions. The paths are constructed in easy gradients and neatly kept. Here a notice requests you to spare the beauties of nature ; there a notice calls on you to admire a specially charming view ; and it is hard to miss your way to the nearest "restauration," where beer flows like water, and, indeed, for sixpence they will turn you on a waterfall as well. In the towns the police will take care that you are in no doubt as to your own identity. They will take care that no flower-pot falls on your head from a neighbour's sill, that the sweet girl opposite practises her music on a summer's noon with the window shut, and that the string with which your enemy's wife leads her lap-dog in the public gardens is short. They will take care that your servant-maid's book registers every fault she has ever committed, and that the applications for your kindly assistance are investigated upon the sternest principles of the Charity Organization Society. Pedagogic specialists will see that your baby's toys are designed for graduated intellectual improvement. Psychological specialists will submit your children to mental vivisection from year to year. At Christmastide your

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wife will drag a goose from market by a string, slaughter it in the back garden, and serve it up with stewed plums, before she lays her tearful cheek upon your shoulder in a passion of humble Wehmuth beside the lighted Christmas-tree, and thanks God you still tolerate her because she has the mind of a cook and keeps the linen straight.

“Oh my brothers,” as the gipsy used to say, why should we suffocate any more? Where is that old grandmother Liberty whom Heine heard whispering strange, sweet tales of freedom into the ears of youth? Does the wind no longer blow upon the heath? Is there not somewhere a woman who sounds the horn of the wild old forest?

XXII

THE DEFORMED TRANSFORMED

THE instability of human things has been lamented to commonplace, and that we know not what a day may bring forth is thought a natural theme, not for joy, but for sorrow. Man's mind is heavily biassed to the apprehension of evil, and a change of fortune commonly signifies a decline. It is seldom that our barometer is set fair, seldom that we care to tap it when it hesitates at change, and if we surreptitiously tap the barometer of a friend, it is in the expectation that it will fall. Every lodging-house keeper and pavement artist has seen better days, but no woman who has risen from penury to a back parlour proclaims that she has seen worse. It has been counted a sign of wisdom in the sage to call no one happy till he dies, for the fated wheel may turn, and the melancholy foreboding of man anticipates a wheel ever gravitating to catastrophe.

Perhaps it is the apparent happiness of childhood, joined to the foreknowledge of other people's death, which thus inclines the world to mournful prophecy. If the man did but remember the immense and inconsolable sorrows of a child, and if he ceased like the animals to contemplate his neighbour's latter end, he might perceive the fair elevations of fortune equally with her declivities. At times we think it would be wisdom to call no man unhappy till he dies ; for within the limits of one's existence the unending ladder of

chance may lead upwards as well as down, and Micawber appear no less a sage than Solon. "To live long," Goethe wrote in one of his later letters, "to live long is to outlive much—men we have loved, hated, or regarded with indifference—kingdoms, capitals, even the very woods and trees we planted in our youth. Why, we outlive ourselves, and are grateful if a few of our powers of body and soul remain to us." We outlive ourselves, but it is possible to outlive the weaknesses of body and soul as well as the powers. Augustus was a fragile youth when in the Proscriptions he displayed a coldness of cruelty very surprising to historians who have never watched the ways of children with flies or frogs; yet he survived his early self into a golden age of bland and considerate benignity, and the one drama written on his life celebrates a forgiving disposition. Had Nero escaped in the drainpipe to live another forty years, who can tell whether he might not have contrived better illuminations for the circus, or have desisted from torturing the senatorial concert-halls with his thin and rusty voice? All men deplore the corruption of the body and the degradation of the soul; but that the body should live at all and the soul be capable of incalculable resurrection is creation's perpetual wonder.

As though to counteract the despairing gloom of man's commonest philosophy and prove that redemption, though slow of foot as penalty is, may be as sure, time now and again flashes upon us some signal example; and in our age none has been so startling, none so legible, as one month's history of the Turkish Empire. For centuries the Turk has stood outside the pale, a thing forbid, irredeemable as Faustus, though the blood of Christ were streaming across the sky. Thirty years ago the leading Englishman de-

scribed the Turkish race as the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. He spoke of their fell satanic orgies. He declared there was not a criminal in a European gaol, nor a cannibal in the South Sea Islands, whose indignation would not rise at the recital of what the Turk had done. For short, the greatest writer of that time summed up the Turk as "unspeakable," and unspeakable the Turk remained. The passing years only accumulated the horror of his crimes. Step by step he descended the inhuman abyss, and the ineffaceable wickedness of his nature stood personified in the ruler who claimed the consecrated succession to his Prophet. The massacre of Armenians followed the massacre of Batak; the massacre of Macedonia took its turn, and red Sultan stood beside black Congo in the universal abhorrence of mankind. For short, the greatest poet of the time summed up Abdul Hamid as "the damned," and damned he long remained.

The strange thing is that the worst that could be said was true; Gladstone, Carlyle, and Mr William Watson were perfectly right; the Turk was unspeakable, Abdul was the damned. And yet within a month what a millennium! What a short cut to the thousand years of joy! Of all the many schemes of reform, the reform least contemplated was the reform of the Turk himself. Now where reaction clutched disruption by the throat, a Committee of Union and Progress extends a smiling reign. The market-place of Monastir breathes to unwonted airs of freedom's Marseillaise; racial assassins join the dance of human brotherhood, and if on the streets of Salonica righteousness and peace have not kissed each other, there has been a great deal of kissing between unrighteousness and war, which is a much more astonishing embrace. Far-off Jerusalem stirs her sacred bones; for the first

time since Titus there is joy upon Mount Zion, and for the first time since the Crusades the Holy Sepulchre is loud with thanksgiving.

Call no man unhappy till he is dead. The lost soul who lurked in Yildiz, feeling at each thread, watchful and fearful as a poison spider, now emerges into the blessed sunshine amid the cheers and blessings of a devoted people ever ready to forgive. The doors are flung wide open, daylight peers into hell, and out there crawls a shattered and blood-stained shape, graven with cruelty and enfeebled by terror, but human still, and possessed of capacities beyond the calculation of astronomers. Who can say? To be sure, a millenium often ends in bloody farce, but if ever there was an opportunity for joy in heaven it is now, and the secret of one Church's power is that she has never called a living spirit lost, nor is there any indeterminate sentence in her laws.

But the unhappiness of time's revenges is their irony. One would have thought the resurrection of Turkey a drama sufficient in itself for any generation, but the dramatist who stages human history has set it against an ironic background that displays unequalled skill, but tinges the scene with bitterness. It is thirty years almost to a day since the Turk received his title of unspeakable and our country's voice, led by the greatest Englishman, acclaimed as mankind's deliverer a certain "divine figure from the North." As England refused the duty, it was the privilege of Holy Russia to free the Christian peoples from unendurable oppression. Up to a certain point, by one way or another, the thing was done, but into what kind of a ghoul has that divine figure from the North now shrunk! The fell satanic orgies for which Mr Gladstone denounced the Turk have changed their

scene to the Caucasus, the Baltic Provinces, and the streets of Kishineff and Odessa. To politicians alone must be left the defence of the Tsar and his agents, for, to repeat Mr Gladstone's words, there is not a criminal in a European gaol not a cannibal in the South Sea Islands whose indignation would not rise at the recital of what they have done in burning villages, execution yards, and torture chambers. That is the irony of time's revenges, and the Sultan himself, with the ability that no one denies him, appears to have perceived this peculiar aspect of the situation ; if, indeed, the following draft of a letter addressed to a divine figure in the North comes from his hand. It purports to be dated from Yildiz Kiosk and runs :—

“ In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. My illustrious Friend, and Joy of my Liver, I write to you in peace, wishing peace for your soul. For many years past, even for more than thirty years, you and your father and your grandfather before you have striven, with God's help, to guide me in the way of righteousness. You have poured great armies into my kingdom ; you have advanced to the walls of my holy capital ; you have slaughtered many thousands of my subjects for my soul's peace. You have accounted me unworthy to rule people unaided ; you have joined the cry of ‘ bag and baggage ’ ; you have appointed agents to check my misdeeds ; you have set an assessor to watch my Inspector-General ; you have refused me leave to expend my own money ; you have united with others in collecting terrible fleets to make me shiver in my guilty bed. For this solicitude I repay you the thanks of a humble and contrite spirit.

“ It is written in our Scripture, ‘ He who accepts guidance, accepts it only for his own soul ; and he who errs ; it is against his own soul that he errs ; nor shall one burdened soul bear the burden of another.’ O my soul ! O my lamb ! You have freed me from my burden, and I call unto you to free your own burdened soul. Deep in repentance, I cry unto you to repent, for surely your hour will come.

“ Before the creation of the world, saith the Prophet, the Lord said unto the angels, ‘ I am about to place a Viceregent in the earth.’ And the angels said, ‘ Wilt Thou place therein one who will do evil and shed blood ? ’ And the Lord said, ‘ I know what you know not.’ O my son, doubtless you are the Lord’s Viceregent in the earth, seeing that for all these years you have been bringing my erring spirit into the right way. Will you then do evil and shed blood ? O my soul, evil things are said of you. You have filled your land with cruelties and abominations such as I myself committed while I went astray. Therefore repent, as I have repented, who am a worm and no man ; for every soul shall taste of death.

“ In our book that is called the Book of Overwhelming it is written, ‘ When the sun is folded up and the stars fall, when the mountains are moved and the camels with young are neglected, when the wild beasts crowd together in their fear and the seas surge with waves, and souls are mated to their bodies again, and the books are spread, and the heavens shall be flayed, and hell be set ablaze with fire, and Paradise brought nigh, then shall the soul know the things that it has done.’

“ O my son, O my friend, think upon these things and repent as I have repented, for God is merciful, is compassionate.

“ The meek in spirit,

“ Abdul.”

And in that prayer even Christendom may join, for thus it is that out of the eater cometh forth meat.

XXIII

BY WAY OF TORTURE

It seems almost incredible that for century after century torture should have been taken as a matter of course ; that in the name of justice men should have inflicted the utmost conceivable anguish upon other men and have been rewarded by the State as for a virtuous and social act, appears rather ludicrous than savage. Surely it was but a madman's dream to change political opinions by twisting joints, or to eradicate spiritual heresies by plucking out hairs. Take any extreme case in England now : take a man who advocates a republic in place of a monarchy, or secular education in place of Voluntary Schools. It is quite beyond our conception of things that even the House of Lords would think of changing his views by crushing his foot, or stretching his body, or keeping him forcibly awake through one of their own debates. As the pain of such torture grew unendurable and they called on him to recant, what value could they give his recantation ? What confidence would they afterwards place in his support of the throne or of the Catechism in schools ? The whole thing is seen to be too ridiculous for argument. Yet that is what rulers did till quite recent times, as history counts time.

Truth was discovered by the same means that taught it. In an extremity of agony which forced even the innocent to lie, the guilty was seized with a passion for truthfulness, and poured out his confession with his

cries. The names he betrayed, the charges he brought against others, received a special importance from his anguish, while with every finger-nail he dropped a friend. The greater the pain the greater the truth. Without torture evidence was hardly thought complete, and at one period of the world it was the privilege of a lady not to be tortured unless all her slaves had been tortured first.

But the ultimate form of torture had no regard to truth whether instilled or extracted. It was pain for pain's sake—suffering inflicted to cause suffering without aim beyond. This has been the commonest form of torture, though the motive is hard to define. Hatred of the criminal may sometimes have come in. The triumph of self-preservation—the feeling of a child who stamps again on a dead wasp—was certainly present. But the deeper motive seems to have been pleasure. Montaigne lived when torture was perhaps at its worst, and evidently he thought the motive was pleasure. He shyly apologizes for being a merciful and tender-hearted man himself, but his denunciation of torture is downright. “Even in matters of justice,” he says, “whatever is beyond a simple death, I deem it to be mere cruelty.” And further on he continues :

“I could hardly be persuaded, before I had seen it, that the world could have afforded so marble-hearted and savage-minded men, that for the only pleasure of murder could commit it, rouse and sharpen their wits to invent unused tortures and unheard-of torments, devise new and unknown deaths, and that in cold blood, and only to this end, that they may enjoy the pleasing spectacle of the languishing gestures, pitiful motions, horror-moving yellings, deep-fetched groans, and lamentable voices of a dying and drooping man.”

Why all mankind below a certain level of development should feel this peculiar pleasure in causing

extreme suffering we must leave to the psychologists. It may be a delight in absolute and unresisted power. It may be a kind of inverted sympathy, a satisfaction that oneself is free from such atrocious misery, just as many people enjoy a funeral. Cats are cruel for practice, and only man for delight. Savages will laugh fit to burst for joy as they stand round their agonizing victim, and the ancient Mexicans who suggested still more fearful tortures to their Christian executioners displayed a quaint perversion of the same pleasure. But it is stranger still that within civilized countries the infliction of bodily anguish has been generally reserved as a penalty for differences of mental opinion, especially on Church and State. That a man thought one king better than another was for generations a sufficient reason why he should lose his bowels before his head, and for misunderstanding a clause in the Athanasian Creed many a sinner has perished from temporal pain before he perished everlastingly. Thus the height of cruelty's pleasure appears to have been reached when a great official or Churchman could watch a hired torturer controverting proposals of reform by slowly killing the reformer with elaborate devices for making him writhe.

It is for the suppression of freedom that tortures have always been expressly used. For freedom of life and mind men and women have suffered more than for the filthiest crimes. "They were tortured," says the old writer, "not accepting deliverance. Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." And having reached that point, unable to restrain his admiration any longer, he throws in the words—"of

whom the world was not worthy." It was the same cause of freedom and the same heroic mind that filled the torture chambers of Europe from Domitian down to Bomba. Always the worst suffering has been reserved for liberty. To silence her voice the cross stood on the hills and the wild beasts were turned into the arena ; to silence her voice the rack drew bodies out like wire, the boot crushed limbs to pulp, the whipcord tightened round the temples, barbed hooks rent holes in the skin, the Virgin's Kiss drove spikes into eyes and mouth, the Scavenger's Daughter closed upon the living flesh. For this the edged pendulum swung ever nearer, water dripped without ceasing on the same inch of skin, sleep was continually forbidden, thirst was encouraged with salt and never satisfied, men were hung for years in wicker cages, like owls in the dark. To think of it is a devil's nightmare. Imagination fails before its horror. It blackens the history of man. It makes us doubt whether he was worth the long travail of creation.

I have written as of the past ; I have pretended to hope that the whole subject was now one of only historical interest as far as Europe goes. But it is not true. The history will have to begin again, and Russia will be its field. Suspicion had long been gathering ; horrible stories of particular cases had been proved. I myself and others who knew something of Russia had told of treatment of revolutionaries in Moscow, of Georgians in the Caucasus, Letts in the Balitic Provinces, and Poles in Warsaw, almost too hideous to be believed. People hoped that the cases might have been isolated, that the abominations might have been wrought in hot blood by scoundrels without sanction. But the admissions made by Makaroff, Assistant Minister of Interior, before the

Duma, cut off such hope. It was officially known that in Riga a special torture commission was appointed in 1906 by the Governor, with the full knowledge of the Public Prosecutor and the Colonel commanding the gendarmerie. Into the chamber of the police-court opposite the fashionable hotel, or into the old castle by the governor's residence, the Lettish prisoners men, women, and even children, were brought for torture, and there before the eyes of Russian officials, invested by the Tsar with all the powers of the Empire, the torturers carried out their appointed cruelties. Even with the memory of mediæval torture fresh in our minds, it is impossible to repeat the horrors that were practised upon those helpless people, whose only offence was a hatred of the Government which oppressed them. It is enough to recall that men were carried away from that chamber in fragments to be shot, and that a child of eight was flogged almost to death to make him betray his father.

The St Petersburg Government promised investigation and the punishment of the guilty. Investigation comes late, for the truth officially acknowledged had been known in Russia for many months. And as to punishment, what agent of the Government or the political police was ever punished for crimes against the people? What official ever suffered for his zeal in inciting to massacre and pogroms? Until Russia changes her whole system of police, her Government will remain excluded from the number of civilized States. Again it is freedom that is tortured, and it is impossible for free nations to treat on terms of equal respect with torturers. Let the Russian Government remember the warning of Spain in 1897, when the tortures of Montjuich alienated from her the sympathies which might have been hers in the war that

came just after. I cannot see how any stable agreement can be concluded between a free nation like ourselves and a Government that sets itself violently and cruelly to suppress every sign of liberty among its own people. Nor can I imagine any Englishmen of ordinary kindness advancing money for the support of a system that employs the torture of men, women, and children, as a means of power.

XXIV

THE BARBARIANS

BRUTAL as mankind has been to beasts and birds and fishes and every sort of living thing, he has lately formed one habit of exceptional brutality, and milliners have now decreed that it shall increase. They have decided that women are to stick more "osprey plumes" in their hats than ever before. What miserable Cockney brain first called those delicate white feathers "osprey," darkness only knows. They have no more to do with ospreys than with rooks. The osprey is the fishing eagle, common on many wild and rocky coasts. Fortunately for it, the only decoration it could give for women's hats is a broad tail or wing feather of barred white and brown. The plumes so falsely called after it are torn from the back of the little white heron, one of the most beautiful and useful birds in all the tropics. It is only in the breeding season that those feathers are grown, and they fall in graceful curves over the tail and wings of the full-grown birds, just when they are nesting and rearing their young. Then it is that the hirelings of fashion go about among the reeds for slaughter. For every plume a parent bird has been deprived of its mate; almost for every plume a brood of young has been left to die slowly of starvation and to rot upon the nest.

For many years past the brutality of the fashion has been perfectly well known. There is no dispute about the facts, or the only dispute is a shameless lie of the

milliners, who will blandly inform a customer that the plume is "artificial," if she shows some glimmering of compunction about wearing it. Probably this is the only case in which a salesman ever tries to palm off a genuine thing as a sham. That the attempt is made seems to prove some lingering aversion to cruelty even among women who follow fashion. But they are easily won over. Blinded by ignorance and desire combined, they do not pause to convince themselves that feathers like those could not be artificial, and that the only artifice about them is that two parts of feathers may be stuck back to back to give "a fulness." Certainly, no natural feather ever grew like that; but every feather in the plume was, nevertheless, plucked from the back of the small white heron—the egret, as its proper name is—killed during the breeding season.

That the truth has been known all these years has made no difference to the fashion. There are some abominations on which publicity has no effect at all. The cocoa slavery seems to be one of them; this is another. Because such things are lucrative or fashionable, nothing is done, and denunciation wastes its breath. It is nearly ten years since the British Consul in Venezuela estimated the total of egrets killed for plumes in one breeding season at over a million and a-half in that State alone. Millions have also come from Florida, where the species is being gradually exterminated. In India, Africa, and other tropical places where it occurs, it is slaughtered in the same way. As the chief destroyer of insects and ticks, the bird is the friend of men and cattle. On the African Coast I have heard it called the buffalo's mate. But let peasants and herdsmen perish in ruin, women must have their "osprey" plumes. In order that, as Browning said, women may go about "clothed with

murder," whole provinces are devastated, and man's benefactors die by millions, even before they are fledged with the feathers that doom their race.

Whether it is any use denouncing a fashion is doubtful. From the denunciation the followers of fashion learn what the fashion is, and they leave the denunciation alone. If we denounced a fashion that picked out the eyes of live robins with pins because the agony gave the breast feathers a peculiar colour that peculiar colour would be seen on many more hats next week. There seems to be no form of cruelty which men and women will not allow others to commit with equanimity, in the hope of being like other people, or just a little more showy themselves. For tortoiseshell the live turtle is exposed to a slow fire, so that his scales may crack apart and be prised off with irons ; he is then returned in horrible pain to the water, on the chance that his casing may grow again and the lucrative process be repeated. For sealskin the seals are bludgeoned where they breed, and the sufferings of the young are used as a lure to bring the mothers up to slaughter. For ivory the elephant is being wiped off the face of Africa. For the most fashionable kinds of "astrakan" and kid the unborn young are ripped from their mothers. For the trimming of women's hats, all the most beautiful creatures of the world are being exterminated by the ton, and, in a generation or two, people will only know from wretched specimens in museums what was the splendour of such birds as the Bird of Paradise, the Golden Pheasant, the Trogon, the Glossy Ibis, and many kinds of Humming Bird and Parrot. All these things, involving all this cruelty and destruction, are merely luxuries or fashions. There is no necessity for them. Except in the one doubtful case of ivory for billiard balls, there is not even

usefulness. But that does not make the contest against cruelty easier. It is rather the chief difficulty in the way of change. If it were only a matter of necessity or usefulness, some substitute would be quickly found, and expensiveness would act as a drawback, instead of an opportunity for display. But against luxury and fashion, charges of cruelty and brutality and savagery fall dead. For the demands of decoration and display are more imperious than the demands of necessity, as anyone can see by looking at a Whitechapel girl on Sunday.

In cruelty women have no monopoly, and the hand that rocks the cradle is not more bloody than a man's. The cruelty that is servant to gluttony is perhaps even more masculine than ladylike, and on the whole it is for the pleasure of men that German geese are tied on their backs so that they cannot move, and crammed by force with pellets, till just before death the right moment for killing comes; for men's pleasures, perhaps, even more than for women's, ortolans and chickens are violently stuffed with food in the dark, and dead larks are sold by the cubic rood. It is only indirectly for women's pleasure that men wear fur coats in climates where no fur is needed, or that bears are slaughtered to make such caps for Foot Guards as no one but a lunatic would wear in battle, or anywhere else, except for fashion. It is still chiefly for the delight of men that the otter, often big with young, is prodded with poles and torn to bits in our streams, that the carted stag is with difficulty driven to run away till he impales himself on our iron fences, that rabbits are given their hopeless little dash for life in the enclosure, that tortured pigeons start to fly before the guns, and that penny rats get five leaps before death on Wormwood Scrubbs of a Sunday morning.

I know all the talk about manly sports, and the peculiarities of certain creatures that must be preserved in order to be butchered, and of others that quite enjoy being hunted to death, and of others that "want killing." But in the skillless, merciless, and perfectly safe sports I have mentioned, there is no motive but the pleasure of cruelty or the pleasure of gambling, and we can do without the manliness of a blood-thirsty crowd which takes no risks and gives no chances.

By the cruelty of fashion, display, and sport, the earth is being left to us desolate. The most beautiful creatures of the wilds are fast disappearing, and the desolation spreads always more quickly as man's weapons improve in accuracy and range, while the growing railroads and hotels enable him to play the butcher with greater comfort, speed, and security. It will be a very dull and monotonous world that our grandchildren will travel through, and they will have very small game on which to glut the lust for blood that has lately increased so much among dull women and men. Cruelty is the vice most natural to dulness of mind, and perhaps that is why Montaigne, always so alert, wrote that "among all other vices there was none he hated more than cruelty, both by nature and judgment, as the extreme of all vices." But now I would chiefly plead the cause of the birds—the most beautiful, the least harmful, and on the whole the most beneficent to man of all the orders of creation. Their flight, their song, their brilliance, their charm of movement and habit, have from of old peculiarly endeared them. Once they were called the earliest of the gods, the first children of Love and Chaos. Their inexplicable sense of space and their knowledge of the seasons for migration, their aloofness, their skill, their passion

for their young, and their general innocence, have always given them something of a fairy influence. To birds most races have looked for their auspices. The stork, the wild swan, the swallow, and the dove have always been the messengers of mankind, and when our fathers wanted to imagine angels, they gave them the wings of a bird, that is covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold. For them I would plead to women. To be clothed with murder in the egret's plumes may in the end be as heavy a thing as to have the albatross tied round your neck. Women have sometimes been thought to be rather more kindly and tender-hearted than men. They have themselves been compared to many of the most beautiful and gentle birds, so that for them to mangle birds is a kind of spiritual suicide. But, whatever I may say, I know I shall appeal in vain. No care for cruelty, no joy in mercy, has ever touched the heart that sets a fashion, or is set on one.

XXV

HIS FIRST DERBY

WHEN Mr Clarkson, of the Educational Office, got up one Wednesday morning and saw it was raining hard, he was inwardly glad. He did not want to hurt his friend Chesham, but still less did he want to go in a motor.

"Smell, noise, dust, goggles, possibly a green veil—no!" he said to himself. "Besides Chesham is a sportsman; he was talking about the secret of riding yesterday in the office, and I'm a little shy on sporting affairs. It's queer one should be. But the rain settles it. Now I can go quietly by train like a human creature among common humanity."

And the milkman, seeing him start in a new brown waterproof, said he looked all right. To which his housekeeper replied: "No matter for what he put on, there's nothing as would make my gentleman look all right for the Durby, heaven help him!"

Common humanity in the train had a very unusual appearance to Mr Clarkson. He seemed in a foreign country, among a clean-shaven, heavy-jawed, small-eyed race, not in the least like the people he knew. "Where are these men when it isn't Derby Day?" he asked himself, but had soon forgotten them in his newspaper's leader on the Colonial Conference Report. Suddenly the human creature at his side asked him what was that paper's fancy. "Oh, it never

has any fancy," he answered; "that's its chief weakness."

Gently but firmly the man took the paper from his hand and turned the page. "Why, where's the sportin' news?" he asked.

"Dear me!" said Mr Clarkson. "I'm afraid I threw that sheet away before we started."

"My God!" said the man quietly, but with infinite pity, and, handing back the paper, he stared silently between his feet for the rest of the journey.

Getting out at Epsom Station and driving to the course in an eighteenpenny brake, Mr Clarkson felt a little depressed and lonely. His companions continued to study the race-cards or sporting columns, and their brief conversation run entirely on the past achievements of horses unknown in the Education Office. He almost wished Chesham had been there to throw over him the protection of a sporting manner. But the glory of the sun bursting through soft clouds, and the interest of common humanity tramping in thousands along the road, or being dragged in every kind of cart, cheered his spirits, and as they reached the top of the down and the blue distance of Surrey extended before them, he stood up in his place and cried, "Oh, what a glorious view!" Whereupon the whole carriage-full stared at him as though he had been a maniac.

To recover his position, he remarked that the advertisement kites flying thick in the air added a new horror to existence, but this had no soothing effect. He was glad to get out and be alone again among the crowd. It was early, and the course was crammed with people, whose ideas of enjoyment appeared to Mr Clarkson bewildering in variety. Rings were formed round conjurors, athletes, tipsters, stilt-walkers,

and, almost thickest of all, round a preacher, who, with interludes of hymns on a clarionet, was pouring out a realistic description of the Derby race for heaven. Up and down the people thronged and wandered. The gentle slopes of the down were black and white with mankind. The flags fluttered, the tents shone, and the sweet wind blew, bearing with it the innumerable noise of voices.

"I really rather like this," thought Mr Clarkson. "I feel like Faust among the Easter crowd. Here I am man; here one may be human. This is the true democracy." And he joined the thick concourse which had just turned all its faces one way to gaze at the stand where it was rumoured the King was about to appear.

But lunch soon occupied every thought, and Mr Clarkson roamed among the drags, motors, gipsy vans, bars, and stalls, unobtrusively composing what he called an Aristophanic ode out of the multitudinous articles that men and women were devouring to support their strength. "The ancients," he thought, "described the stomach as a thrifty thing. To me its outbursts of prodigality are far more remarkable. Why can it accommodate quite twenty times more than usual to-day because a few horses are about to compete in a trial of speed?"

But he had only just fitted pork-pies, salad, and whelks into his ode when his attention was distracted by the outcries of conspicuous figures, who, in amazing hats and belts, were proclaiming their own high reputation for prophesy and integrity. He listened with bewilderment. "Three to one bar one, five to one bar two 'orses!" "I'll take six pound or more, six pound or more I'll take!" "Nine to one bar one!" "Ten to one Bezonian!" What could it all mean?

"It's no good; I never could do mathematics," he murmured to himself.

But, happily, at that moment he saw Chesham, with a carefully dressed party, making his way to an enclosure. He followed, paid, and entered. After greetings, he eagerly enquired, "I say, Chesham, you're a sporting man, you can explain it all to me. What do these men mean by shouting 'three to one bar one, or five to two on the field?' Here's a man actually saying, 'I'll take ten to one, I'll take fifty to forty.' I was never any good at mathematics, but I do know that those two propositions cannot be identical!"

"All right, old man," Chesham answered hurriedly; "those are only the bookies, you know. It's their way of doing business. It is all quite simple when once you understand it. But there's no need to ask about it quite so loud. I'll try to explain it to you in the office to-morrow. Look, there's a horse doing his canter!"

"So there is!" said Mr Clarkson. "But how badly the man rides! You told us yesterday the secret of riding was to sit well back in the saddle. That man is right over the horse's neck, and he doesn't sit at all. Why, he's balancing on his stirrups! If one of them broke, he would have a serious fall. I declare, you could see daylight under his trousers! It must be very painful to you to witness such an exhibition."

But Chesham had vanished with his friends, and Mr Clarkson missed the first two races in trying to puzzle out the odds on a piece of paper.

Then, with both hands, he clung to his place at the iron railings, and the crowd grew serious. One by one the Derby horses were led past with long white

tapes. They turned to canter to the start. Comments were brief but frequent. "Which is the favourite horse, please?" asked Mr Clarkson. His neighbour glanced with silent contempt, but thought better of it and said, "Red cap. Like him?" "To me they all look very good horses," Mr Clarkson answered modestly. "But that one seems to be moving its hind legs a little stiffly," and he pointed to Orby.

In his heart he was wondering whether the horses and jockeys were as terrified with excitement as he had been when he went in for "Greats" at Oxford, and longed to walk in any other direction than to the Schools.

But second by second time went on. All came as he had read in the years when he was a boy—the hush, the cry at the start, the hush renewed, the vision of flickering forms far away on the hill, the sudden apparition of things coming round the corner, small and noiseless as mice, the deep roar of the crowd sounding nearer and nearer, a rush and flutter of men and horses, one horse close against the side, running straight and sure, another close beside it with nose past the saddle and seeming to gain, a third running wild and large, then a bunch of others, invisible, unnoticed. It was tremendous, flashing, intense! "A hundred to one! Five to two!" shouted Mr Clarkson, and it was over.

He returned to his flat in a glow of extended sympathy. On getting more than his fare at the door, the cabman remarked, "Good race, sir?" "Yes," said Mr Clarkson, "I think it might be called a good race. A light brown horse was very nearly overtaken by a dark brown horse. In fact, I thought it would be beaten. A good race, certainly."

"You don't 'appen to remember them 'orses' names, I suppose, sir?" asked the cabman with innocent irony.

"No, I'm afraid I didn't observe that," said Mr Clarkson, "but perhaps this *Westminster* will tell us."

"Well, I'm damned," muttered the cabman, meditatively driving away, "and I've knowed the places these three hours past!"

XXVI

THE PASSING OF THE HORSE

It was at a Berkshire fair one autumn Saturday, and the merry-go-rounds whirled full blast. There they went, those gallant steeds, black, white, or brown to choice ; all with four legs and fearless eyes and crimson nostrils ; all made to pitch up and down like a boat in a head wind, irresistible to any child of mettle, while steam urged their wild career to an orchestral setting of " Bonnie Dundee," the tune to which real soldiers do their Military Ride. But that night the saddles were all empty, and in the place of honour at the very summit of the fair was seen another show. It was a merry-go-round, to be sure, but instead of childhood's horses, a series of motor cars in little went plunging over hill and dale as at a Manx competition, and the village crowd, eager to taste the joys of riches at a penny, stood in long rows awaiting their turn. Lamps blazed, the motors flew, and a steam orchestra blared out the Hallelujah Chorus.

In that dim village scene was symbolized the completion of an era, the close of a long stage in man's rough journey upon creation's road. It was the passing of the horse that was signified, the death and burial of man's antediluvian friend. There he still stood, beautiful as of old, decorated with mane and tail, his coat glossy, his neck clothed with thunder ; patient, too, a creature of regular —nay, of cast-iron—habits, always ready to tread the daily round ; a better

Conservative than the squire himself, esteeming the doing of a thing once to be quite a sufficient reason for doing it again, whether it were shying at a white post or stopping at the public's door ; always with one eye turned to his distant stall like the needle to the pole ; true as a lark to the kindred points of stable and home ; an imprisoned spirit, an Ariel with hoofs for hands and feet, an angel to whom only the Greeks gave wings, a messenger harnessed to the chariot of the sun, and equally serviceable in a hansom. There he stood, brave as of old, and wistfully enduring ; but no one considered him now, for his day was done.

His day is done, and Mr Basil Tozer has written his obituary notice. It is called "The Horse in History" and displays something of the confusion and mournful repetition of a last lament. I should suppose Mr Tozer to be more at home in the paddock than the lecture room ; at all events, for the sake of his pocket I hope so, and when he tells us that the Bug flows into the Caspian, or speaks of "Virgil's famous Georgics," or says Bucephalus ought properly to be spelt Bucephalos, I should prefer to ask him the odds. But what a spacious and fascinating theme he has chosen for an epitaph ! He might have extended it beyond the limits of historic man, for I vaguely remember how a course of Huxley's lectures on the horse was suddenly checked by the discovery of remote remains of horses in Mexico no bigger than foxes ; and I more clearly remember the discovery of the fossilized missing link between a horse and a bear, though the unlearned mind would expect more links than one—as many missing links as between a gentleman and a road hog. But long before the verbal record of man begins, the anthropoid conceived the notion of moving from place to place by clinging to a

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horse's back and using his own prehensile tail as a girth to keep him steady. His seat was further assisted by the hairiness of horses in days when they were the natural companions of furry mammoths, and even Herodotus mentions horses north of the Danube with coats five fingers long, so that they must have been shaggier than bears, and both easy and comfortable to ride by grip. So early did the servitude of the horse begin, nor, indeed, can we suppose that so generous and defenceless a creature would, apart from man's protection, have survived the winged and plashing dragons which at that time enjoyed the earth's productive surface.

By the date of Job the horse was commonly used as an engine of war, and has been so used ever since, though it is doubtful how far he really enjoys the battle, or says among the trumpets, "Ha, ha." Mr Thomas Hardy had better reason on his side when he proposed that at the point of danger in an engagement the horses, as innocent beings, should be left behind, or conducted out of harm's way. The ancient Egyptians were condemned for trusting too much to cavalry, and we know from Miriam that the horse and his rider were thrown into the Red Sea with the rest of Pharaoh's host. But in Homeric times riding was no longer fashionable, and in war the horses were used only for chariots. Horse racing with chariots was also popular on off-days in the siege of Troy, and the betting ran to biggish stakes—a cooking pot, a tripod, a horse and cart, or a girl; the last three being counted as about equal in value. Some riders still rode by voice and knee without bit or bridle; some used a halter only. But the Greeks had already forced the bit between the horse's lips, though we do not hear that they kept the lips sore, as is now the habit in

parts of the Near East, as so to increase the control. Horse-cloths were early employed for comfort, as the horse began to lose his fur, and Alexander used one ; but the Athenians of the Parthenon rode bare-back, and saddle and stirrups, I believe, did not appear till after the Christian era. Horsemen mounted by leaping on with a pole, or making the horse crouch like an elephant, or standing upon a slave's back. I gather, too, from one of Mr Tozer's pictures, that riders mounted like sailors, indifferently on the star-board side of the horse or on the port—a rare though useful accomplishment now. In Greece the horse was always the evidence of riches, and their quickest drain ; and, in spite of motors, the tradition of his respectability still lingers in our remoter counties, where, if you even walk in riding breeches, you will see all the peasants touch their hats to them. Nor can we deny to the ancients a personal affection for their horses, when we remember the knightly kindness of Xenophon in his treatise on riding, or how Caligula caused his horse to be elected consul, and the Emperor Verus fed his upon almonds and raisins.

Colour always played much part in the destiny of this curious animal. The Greeks preferred a bright chestnut (not a dun, as Mr Tozer thinks), but their expression of colour was a little vague, being almost limited to bright and dark, so that they would call a man, or even a woman, the same colour as a horse. Black is a natural colour for highwaymen and the thundercloud of chargers, but why the Scots Dragoon Guards choose the dappled grey of Dobbin I do not know. Piebald was much affected in ancient times for its distinction, and, I suppose, because piebald horses are difficult to steal. That reason made them popular in the Boer War whenever patriotic auxiliaries

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were in the neighbourhood. The circus maintains an old tradition, for the horses of William the Conqueror's cavalry were brilliantly parti-coloured, those that were not Prussian blue all over frequently having the near legs yellow and the off legs crimson, as may be seen on the Bayeux tapestry to this day. White was the choice of heroes who wished to be conspicuous on the field, like Castor and Pollux, who could die only on alternate days. But in modern warfare that heroic desire is fading away, and in South Africa there was a large demand for Condyl's Fluid, which turns a white horse to khaki. I once rode a horse that had to be kept with his off-side always towards the enemy, because the Fluid had run short and the near side was left as white as a sepulchre.

It is grievous to think that all this is over now. I cannot lament that the Calvary of the cab horse (as Mr Cunningham Graham has called it) should end, and heels no longer beat the rhyme to wheels. But with the horse there passes away a peculiar race of man—a centaur breed, such as no motor can beget. Cabmen, 'busmen, stable-boys, grooms, coachmen, whips, jockeys, trainers, and the Horse Guards Blue—all will follow their long-nosed friend into the abyss of time. I regret them all, but the horse himself I most regret. He was so stoical, so Tory, so refined and good to eat. What will a starving siege do without him now? What will the makers of Chevril do, and the cats, and the poor? When he is gone, who shall tell of horses that champed the golden corn, of the snow-white steeds the Dioscuri rode, of bright Æthon, horse of Pallas, that bedewed the earth with big tears at his young master's funeral, of the Cid's horse Cid, of Richard's Roan Barbary, of Warwick's Black Saladin, of Mary's Black Agnes, of Turpin's

Black Bess, of Rinaldo's Bajardo, of the Bayard's Carmen, of the happy white horse that carried Joan, the flower of chivalry, of sad Rosinante that bore chivalry's bones, of Napoleon's Marengo, of Wellington's Copenhagen, of the nursery rocking-horse, and the Wooden Horse of Troy? The whole dear race will soon be gone—gone with Flying Childers, the fastest horse that ever lived, and with Eclipse, the greatest of sires, at whose birth the sun and moon were troubled in their courses—gone with Gladiateur, and Blue Gown, and Blair Athol and Hermit, and Ormonde, and Persimmon and Flying Fox—gone with the winners of yester year. In a touch of irresistible pathos, Mr Tozer tells us the demand for oats has fallen by more than twenty per cent., and there were 12,000 fewer horses in the kingdom last year than the year before.

The age of mechanism and peace is before us. Already we foresee the day when the last living soldier will take the field upon the last living horse, while nursemaids and grooms are sighing and sobbing around. We foresee the day when tagging writers will say, "extinct as the horse," instead of "extinct as the ——" Oh, we know what the creatures say now, and we will not couple our last farewell to our Arab steed with the similitude of a waddling, wingless bird! Already we foresee the day when the white horse that Death rides in the Revelation alone will survive, and if at last we behold him, he will be something of a curiosity.

XXVII

AN IRISH PILGRIMAGE

HIGH above Clew Bay, in county Mayo, rises the great cone of Croagh Patrick. Like the sacred mountain of Japan, it stands conspicuous and almost isolated, looking over the sea on one side to the mountains of Achill, and on the other to the wild country of Murrisk. Though hardly one-third of Fujiyama's height it is as sacred to its own land, and for fourteen centuries has been the chosen scene of pilgrimage.

For "the Reek," as the Irish call it, is closely connected with Ireland's missionary saint. Here he worked many of his queer miracles ; here he slew the terrible bull of Cormack Dhu and brought it back to life ; here the serpents and other dragons made their last stand against him and were driven writhing into the water. Here we may imagine him in reality as a poor way-worn scholar from the civilized banks of the Loire, climbing the height in mist and wind, that from there he might pray for this wild and unknown land of the West on the very edge of the mysterious ocean's encircling stream. A few comrades were with him, who had followed their man of courage into the realms of savage heathendom. Around them were the queens and chieftains, the warriors and poets of mingled myth and history, whose records and arts we now search after with such eagerness. But to the wandering teachers of the young religion from the East these were only the indistinguishable heathen, part of those

foredoomed multitudes of humanity whom Christ had come to save.

On the mountain's top he built a rude chapel. The place may still be seen, in a hollow like a little crater, close to the very summit. It has been roofed over lately with a few sheets of corrugated iron held down by piles of rocks, for Mayo is a poor county and has been passing through centuries of trouble and hunger and war. But that corrugated iron marks the most sacred spot of the west, and it is perhaps characteristic that while the English people used to make pilgrimages to the rich shrines in comfortable towns like Canterbury or Bury in the days when England still had saints, the Irish people make their pilgrimage to a desolate mountain peak, swept by the rain and wind, with no town nearer than poor little Westport, and that many miles away. The path by which St Patrick probably first ascended has been worn by the feet and knees of generations. For some reason the pilgrimage has always been especially sought after by women who long for children or a blessing on them. That longing has kept the track well marked, and women who sought a special grace either of pardon or hope till lately climbed the steepest part of the path on bare knees.

One Sunday in August 1904, being the Vigil of the Assumption, was the great pilgrims' day. There is an ancient custom on that day to celebrate the mass in St Patrick's Chapel. When the terrible change came over Ireland, after the famine, the custom died away with the rest, but in 1903 it came to life again as part of that reviving hope and intellectual movement which are rapidly renewing the face of the country. From the earliest morning the pilgrims began to gather round the foot of the mountain. They came from Sligo and Athlone, from Galway and

the wilds of Connemara. They came from Lough Conn and every part of Mayo. The red-petticoated women with bare legs came from Achill. One could not estimate how many came. Was it three thousand or ten thousand? It did not matter. There were a great many, and by eight in the morning the straggling lines from every quarter began to converge upon the main pilgrims' path, till from foot to summit it was like a dark mountain stream.

That was a long and difficult climb. It took nearly three hours, and the wild weather made it more toilsome. Where the mountain gave the path no shelter from the west, the wind rushed down and struck us off our feet as though with blows. Storms of drenching rain kept sweeping over us, and as we mounted, the rain turned to hail and was driven against our faces in a sharp dust of ice. The track first led up the beds of streams and through boggy earth beaten to slime by feet. But it mounted steadily the whole time, and after about an hour and a half each pilgrim in the long, dark line reached the "butt" or shoulder of the mountain, drenched through and covered with black earth to the knee, but happy for the few yards of flat walking along the ridge, with glimpses through the mist of green fields far below, and of white seas, and of a few lonely tarns, which an old woman told me had been "the receptacles of the serpents."

Then began the final struggle up the cone itself. It mounts at a very steep angle and, where the bare rock does not come through, it is covered with loose scree or slippery earth. To climb it that morning was like going up a rickety ladder, with thousands in front and thousands upon the rungs behind. One could see nothing but the next uncertain step, and it felt as though the fall of one would bring the whole string

of us tumbling down to the bottom. But it was an Irish crowd, and if one of us stumbled or fell, or was blown off the track, those around him, instead of growling, "Damn your soul," as an English crowd would have done, only said, "God bless you," or "God save you and send you safe to the top."

At intervals here and there a few bare-legged women had clustered under the shelter of the stones, and were already deep in prayer. Some who had shoes and stockings took them off and clambered over the loose stones bare-foot to increase the splendour of the pilgrimage. Some, with the same object, struck out a wandering route away from the track or followed the ancient Stations of the Cross. A little tent had been set up as a robing-room for the Archbishop of Tuam, the Bishop of Athenry, and other priests. Just before noon they passed in their vestments into the low chapel lighted by one or two flickering candles, and entirely open to the air but for that corrugated-iron roof. During the consecration and elevation a violent storm of freezing hail and rain fell upon us, and the gale increased in fury ; but not a man's head was covered, and all strove to kneel, though the crush made it almost impossible. One woman, who must have started at sunrise, had secured the place upon the roof just above the altar itself. What tragedy of childlessness or sorrow for children may have been signified, one could not know, but during the whole service she remained with uplifted hands prostrate upon that piece of corrugated iron as the most holy place on earth.

When service was over, there should have been a procession, and all the little banners with their Irish inscriptions were ready to be attached to the bare poles scattered among the crowd. But the tempest

was too pitiless for banners, and, without further ceremony, the Archbishop, in purple biretta, addressed the people upon St Patrick's life and the spiritual meaning of the day's celebration. Even his great voice could not be heard far under the deluge and storm, though the crowd cheered him with enthusiasm, both for his eloquence and his courage in coming. Then the descent began, and the descent of thousands of people down one long slope covered with loose rocks and slippery bog is almost as difficult as the going up, especially when an irresistible wind is driving them from behind.

I do not know that any other people in the world would have made such a pilgrimage as that. In Italy there are great pilgrimages, and dilettante Englishmen go to stare at them as picturesque events. But on Croagh Patrick the conditions are different; there is no display, and, thank God! there are no English tourists. The service is the natural outcome of the people's devotion and imaginative power, nor in the course of long wanderings in many lands have I seen a religious ceremony more simple-hearted or more entirely free from the insensate smartness which is vulgarity. One of Ireland's young poets has spoken of "passion's cloud-strewn path to God." That would be a good description of what the pilgrimage meant to the peasants who were there.

XXVIII

THE MAGIC SNAKE

OR, 'THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM

AMONG the golden joys of Africa are many varieties of snake. There is the python, that kills with much cherishing. There is the whip snake, that leaps over the ground in swishing loops. There is the snake that spits straight at the eye of man or leopard, causing terrible pain and blindness for several days ; the natives call it Mbamba Twan, or the child-catcher. And there is the magic snake, which glides straight along the ground, with no apparent movement of its muscles. The natives call it Mtaba, or the umbrella snake, and it has got the name of magic because it bites the soul. After being attacked by it, the body may continue in its usual health, but the soul never entirely recovers from the shock.

I have myself fallen a victim to the poisonous creature, and this is how it came about. Nearly half-way through the siege of Ladysmith I was walking up the main road of the village with my dear friend W. T. Maud, the admirable artist of the *Graphic*, who died about three years later in Somaliland. We were seeking a nurse for George Steevens, that genius among correspondents, who had just been struck down by the fever that killed him in the end. It was evening, and the short twilight had just faded from the air, but the crescent moon still hung in the West—wrong way round, as is usual in South Africa ;

astronomers only know why. The Boers had ceased their bombardment, and were resting, with a sense of duty accomplished. The summer air was so still, the depth of night so pure, that it was hard to imagine we had been in danger day by day for nearly two months, and now had a respite of only a few hours. We were trying to spell out the dots and dashes from Buller's flashlight, thrown on a cloud from beyond Colenso, and had just read "Baby sends kiss" (it was near Christmastide), when, looking down, I caught sight of a black thing moving rapidly across the road close in front of our feet.

It was about three feet long or a little less, and was moving very swiftly. In a perfectly straight line, it darted forward, without the usual snake-like wriggling or other visible means of movement. Accustomed from boyhood to hunt adders on the Cumberland moors, I naturally have no fear of snakes; so I dashed upon it with my stick and broke its back with a single blow. Nevertheless, it still continued to move forward, as snakes will, no matter how desperately wounded. Quickly judging the moment, I sprang on its head, and stamped it into the dust with my boot. At the same time Maud, who had only just perceived our danger, stamped on its back. The long and deadly body gave a few little jerks, and then lay still.

"That was plucky," said Maud. "You got the start of me. It was your scoop—that snake!"

I confess I was pleased. I had been in two campaigns with Maud, and knew his utter fearlessness in the presence of extreme danger. So I laughed, and we went on to the tin cottage where we had heard there was an nurse.

Having finished our business, we walked back to

poor Steevens by another road, and an hour or so later I went home. On the way I had to pass the very spot where we had killed the snake, and I found its mangled remains still lying in the dust. Being something of a naturalist I thought I would examine it in the morning. So, carefully balancing it on the point of my stick (for a poisonous snake will often bite after death), I carried it in front of me through the darkness till I reached the little house where I occupied a room. Then I laid the snake down at the foot of a eucalyptus tree beside the gate, and went to bed.

I had chosen a cottage close under the naval batteries because I knew that the Dutch would fire at the batteries rather than at a house, and they were remarkably good shots with their big guns. And so next morning, at the first ray of dawn, one of the Long Toms called me early as usual by sending a huge shell, which buzzed over the cottage roof and burst with a vast report against the rocky hillside in front of my window. Both our 4.7 guns answered instantly, almost shaking me out of bed, and so the firing went merrily on. As usual, I strolled out for an early morning walk to watch the bombardment, and going down the little garden path I remembered the snake's body lying under the gum-tree.

I was just turning to look for it when I heard the warning whistle that showed a big shell was coming our way. About two hundred yards to my right was a small outpost from a battalion on Tunnel Hill. It was their sentry's whistle that was blowing, and I saw the men leisurely turn from their preparations for breakfast and gather under a low traverse, or shelter-wall, of loose rocks that they had piled up for protection. From the moment of the gun's flash a shell took twenty-two seconds to reach us, so that there

was usually time to get under cover if you chose ; but we had grown very indifferent about it.

Suddenly, as I looked there rose a brilliant orange blaze upon the topmost rock of the traverse. A great cloud of brown smoke enveloped the group of khaki soldiers. Then came the crash of a tremendous explosion, and for a second all was still. The dark cloud began to roll heavily away. Where the group of men had been preparing their breakfast I caught sight of a few khaki forms stretched among the rocks. One figure, blackened and scorched with the explosion, sprang to his feet and rushed down the hill, shrieking, "Oh, mother ! mother ! mother !" Then he fell headlong in a senseless heap.

I had hardly realised what had happened when I heard an angry buzz coming towards me through the air. I knew at once it was a fragment of the shell, thrown off at right angles, as often happens with melinite. It was coming slowly, like a bird in flight. Instinctively I bent my head. I heard it cut a twig off a branch above me, and at the same moment it fell with a heavy thud upon the ground, just at the foot of the eucalyptus tree. It was a jagged fragment of iron weighing about eight pounds.

I gazed at it, as though fascinated after my near escape, and I saw that it had fallen right across the snake, and had cut it clean in half.

To my astonishment I noticed that the snake's inside was pure white. I looked closer. It was white cotton-wool. The skin was a silken umbrella case. The body was carefully wound round with black thread, and a long piece of cotton projected from the mouth—the place where the deadly fangs ought to have been.

Being something of a naturalist, as I said, I took

the creature up in my hand, lifting it with care, because I remembered that poisonous snakes will bite even after death.

I thought that at the end of the campaign I would bring it home and present it to the South Kensington Museum. It needed no stuffing.

And now, whenever I am downhearted and want to think of something that is happy, I think of the little boy (or little girl) who sat behind a wall with a piece of cotton in his hand and watched two experienced war correspondents pluckily dancing upon his magic snake and leaving it for dead.

XXIX

THE CHILD'S FETISH

I KNOW the Toy Exhibition in Southampton Row had a very instructive and educational side. The mere use of the German word "Foreword" on the programme was enough to warn everyone that "Pädagogik" was lurking somewhere. And, sure enough, ten lines down the "Foreword," one came to the Toy as a "profound educational agency," and were further told that "educational possibilities in the way of informing and developing the minds of children by means of toys are practically unlimited." Writing evidently with authority, the *Westminster Gazette* also stated that the exhibition was "organised by the Sociological Association principally for the purpose of teaching parents how to select their children's toys, so that they may unconsciously instruct them as well as merely amuse them."

It is all quite true, of course. I have not the slightest doubt that, taken by the hundred thousand, the minds of little boys and girls do follow those queer curves meandering through rigid squares, on the scientific charts of pleasure that hung on the walls. It is not very informing to be told that the human young first take delight in "biting and tasting plays." No one who has watched a baby with its coral, or a child of three with a pot of jam or rat's-bane ever thought of doubting it. But when the curves proceed to show that the young regularly pass on from the biting and

tasting stage through the stages of hunting, pasture, and agriculture, to the final stage of "shop and commerce," which is continued till the age of forty, then we feel we are on the edge of a peculiar scientific theory. Darwin used to insist, perhaps too confidently, that from the first conception of life a being passed rapidly through all the stages of incalculable evolution that had produced its parents, so that every creature at maturity was not merely the heir of all the ages, like Tennyson's "trampled orphan," but their living summary, their abstract in little, their hurried addition. Similarly, these sociological curves in terms of toys tend to establish the hypothesis that the human being's mind skims precipitately through the untold cycles of its ancestral history, from the biting and tasting stage that may be studied with the help of nuts or a mustard sandwich in a certain House at the Zoo, through the slow millenniums of Nimrod, Abraham, and Ruth, up to the highest development of man in a haberdasher's back-parlour or some living-in establishment on the Commercial Road.

It is kind of the curves to continue childhood's delight in the toys of shop—true "idols of the marketplace"—up to the age of forty. But after that age they hold out no further hope of play, and childhood would seem to be over, did we not recall the many maturer citizens who may still be seen trafficking useless goods with zest, cultivating their suburban gardens in the agricultural stage, shepherding their children or their dogs, sitting in punts or missing rabbits with the hunter's lust for blood, and even condescending to the "biting and tasting plays" of the first stage of all, with an occasional drink. The oldest need not despair. As long as there is life, there are toys, and the mind in maturity, like the fully-developed body,

is but the summary of its past, capable of renewing its old delights, not in successive stages, but haphazard as they come.¹ Look at any decent man and woman among children—do you suppose they are meditating the Sociological Association's precepts and choosing out games and toys that may instruct and not merely amuse, remembering that from one to four is "the age of social play," from four to six "the age of individual play," and so on through the ages of "intelligent play," "competitive group games," and "co-operative group games?" Not a bit of it. They are full of the game themselves. They are enjoying part of their own summary. The man who does not take as much delight in making the boat, and the woman in dressing the doll, as the child for whom they are supposed to be working must be poor, bloodless creatures, born decrepit in soul—

"Hated as their age increases,
By their nephews and their nieces."

Every age of life has its natural and appropriate toys, if we may include among toys such things as art collections, walking-sticks, books, and funerals. But it is more comforting as a sign of human brotherhood that certain forms of toy are universally beloved from pole to pole, and from the anthropoid up to Queen Victoria. That girls from world-without-end should have taken the doll to their hearts, was but an expectation of providence, for the usage of motherhood has been the one thing essential to mankind. In such Exhibitions of delight as that, or in the Museum cases still gazed upon by their mummies, are to be seen the crude and rigid dolls of Egypt, fashioned before Bishop Usher's creation of the world; the dolls of Greece, jointed limb for limb like the dolls of Holland now;

and the Roman doll swaddled in grave-clothes to comfort a buried child. Here is the Kaffir doll of gourd and beads, the Nigerian doll of lizard skin, the Congo doll of solid iron, the Khartoum doll of clay with savage eyes, the hairy doll from Greenland's icy mountains. Some Gascon of the Gironde has imagined the startling doll of a ghost ; and last comes silly Suffolk with two of the best dolls of all—one a flowered skirt of rag, a shawl, a cap, with all the obdurate, unyielding Suffolk nature painted on its velveteen face ; the other, mere jointed slivers of flint, such as once were used for implements of war.

Give man or woman the first glimmer of art, and dolls are as inevitable as hairpins. But what about knuckle-bones ? What practice necessary for the preservation of the race, what indispensable pleasure, lies in throwing the joints of pigs or sheep into the air and catching them on the back of your hand ? I could have imagined many forms of delight equal to that, and some superior. Yet knuckle-bones are almost conterminous with humanity ; for Pompeian ladies they were modelled of crystal, for our country labourers "dibs" must serve ; but immortal souls of nearly every colour have spent much of their brief portion here below in tossing them up. Dice and draughts are widely common to mankind, and hardly more exhilarating than knuckle-bones, before coinage was current. The top, the whistle, the rattle, and the drum seem almost universal, and they more deeply stir the spirit. But, indeed, the instruments of sound, including the comb, the bull-roarer, the slate pencil, and the squib, are scarcely to be reckoned as toys in the proper sense, being in their perfection little else than miniature anticipations of the orchestra.

Imperfection is in the essence of a toy, as of all

great art. Those exact imitations of grocers' shops and milk-carts, steamers, gigs, and good little children having tea may be all very well for princes and the young of millionaires. Princes and millionaires are abnormal *ex officio*. But the genuine child turns wearily from them to the obvious impossibility of that Canton dragon, that Burmese tiger, or to the crocodile that cocks its tail like a wren, or merely to a string of bobbins and a rag-doll with no legs and a patch of velveteen for a face. In the Exhibition there was a castle made by Bermondsey children, that was noble in its powerful imperfection—as noble as the Bayeux tapestry, which it strangely recalled. There was also a yellow 'bus running from Hornsey to Victoria, that could hardly be beaten for the unconscious excellence of its horseflesh—straight barrel body, straight legs of stick, neck and head flat and clear as from Caran d'Ache's own stables. But I dare not praise for fear of self-consciousness, and the moment such art becomes conscious, it is dead.

Here and there a genuine idol had got mixed up in the merry show, like a parson at a ball, and it is never very easy to draw the line. With what kind of life and power does the heathen invest the queer shape he has made and worships? In reason he knows that it is not alive, he knows that at any moment he could break it in pieces, throw it on the fire with the rest of the log, and say, "Ah, ha! I am warm!" Yet he is afraid of it, he cherishes it, beats it, feeds and washes it, sometimes he even keeps a doctor for its complaints. We think a girl is very seldom afraid of her own doll's powers, though a mask or ugly form which he has himself made will terrify even a boy to distraction. But otherwise a child will cherish a doll, beat, feed, wash it, and constantly believe it is ill

enough for bed and singularly unpleasant medicines. Undoubtedly, the doll is endowed with a kind of living personality not far removed from the idol's, and we do not wonder that in Japan, where certain ancestral dolls may be played with only once a year, they have become household gods, as sacred as the Penates were. To the enlightened, it may appear very foolish and superstitious ; but, after all, let us take the enlightened themselves. Does not the great poet, the great novelist, invest with some kind of life the creature whom he produces just as truly as a girl makes a rag doll ? If he does not, I would not give a doll's hair for all his characters together, and did not Thackeray himself, at the end of his greatest novel, talk of putting away his toys into their box ?

XXX

THE INDEPENDENT MAN

I MET him first in a hut, in Central Africa, some hundreds of miles from the coast, on the high forest watershed which pours down the Congo on one side and the Zambesi on the other. Two American doctors had lately built the hut there because it was the furthest point in the world from civilization. They shared with us their supper of flabby millet cakes and large leaves stewed in the gravy of the last week's chicken (for provisions were short), and meantime both the doorways and all the chinks between the logs gleamed with the white eyes and sharp-pointed teeth of Chebokwe men and women, mute with astonishment at the antics of white people eating at table.

He sat opposite me—a world-beaten man, long over fifty, so thin you could study his skeleton as he moved, with a trustful yet restless eye, always on the search. All his life he had been on the search. He had prospected for gold in Colorado while the Pony Post still ran ; he had dug for gold in Australia, was among the first at the gold mines in Barbiton, had lost everything on the Rand in the gold boom, had tried every rock in Rhodesia for gold, had been everywhere that gold is, except the Gold Coast.

He was now on his way there, had spent four or five months tramping across the heart of Africa, from the gold mines at Umtali, because he had heard there was still gold on the Gold Coast. There was

nothing he didn't know about gold, nothing he hadn't done with it, except get it.

"I'm trekking to the sea," he said; "I'll work on the new railway at Benguela till I save the steamer fare to the Gold Coast. Then I'll be all right. Put me near gold, and I'm all right."

He had been near gold from boyhood, and here he was in the middle of Africa, starved, rotten with privation, his coat and trousers torn to rags and caked with mud, a blue jersey his only other garment, his hat dating from his first arrival at Cape Town, or from someone else's arrival. I liked the man. I seemed to recognize in him a kindred spirit.

"Well," I said, in common civility, "I'm going down to the sea too. I shall be there in six or seven weeks. You'd better come along with me. I've got sixteen carriers, and the provision loads are getting light, worse luck! One of the boys can easily take your stuff."

Then we fell to talking the usual African talk—lions, fevers, deaths, and gold, always gold—till the doctor missionaries called us to evening service among their hospital huts, and a swarm of black and naked creatures, with teeth like a shark's, shouted the native version of "O Paradise, O Paradise! Who does not crave for rest?"

When I met the doctors the next morning I asked for the stranger, and with some hesitation they told me he had gone before daylight.

"The fact is," they added, "he felt hurt at your kindly offer. He seems to be a proud, sensitive, independent sort of man who will take help from nobody. So we lent him one of our own boys, with enough food to last him through the Hungry Country, and he went."

I expressed admiration of their hospitality and of the man's independent spirit, and thought no more about him till about ten days later, when I was passing through the 250 miles of the Hungry Country myself, and there I found him, seated beside the narrow wandering footpath. His generous greeting showed I was forgiven.

I pitched my tent near some water close by, and, so as not to wound his feelings again, sent him a formal invitation to dinner, on a card. In honour of the occasion I opened one of the few remaining tins that I kept as special treats, because, though they had gone bad with age, they were at least English, and I myself looked forward to one of them so much that I tried to make each last two or three days. But that night I was too feverish to eat, and the man said the stuff wouldn't improve with keeping. So he ate it all.

When he had finished he said he felt better, and that if only he could get to the Gold Coast he'd be all right. He then admired my little tent very much, and I wanted to offer him a share of it, but was always afraid of offending his sensitive nature.

Next morning, as I was still shaking with fever, I told two of my boys to carry me in a "tipoi" (hammock) I had brought for such emergencies. But seeing the man binding up his feet with dirty rags in the bushes, and preparing to start evidently in great pain, I overcame my scruples, and asked if he would take a turn at being carried.

"Well," he said, "it would be all for your good if I did. You'd much better walk and have a good sweat, with that fever on you."

So he got into the hammock, and soon fell into a delightful sleep, which lasted till we reached our

camping ground in the afternoon. By then the fever had left me. "I knew you'd be better for walking," he said, with all the wisdom of age and rough experience.

In the evening I sent him another formal invitation to dinner. I gave him only a Portuguese tin this time, but he raised no objection, and as he sat smoking my cigarettes afterwards, he said with a sigh of contentment, "By George, there's nothing like sleeping in the open air to make you feel healthy. It must be six months since I slept under cover, except a rest hut. But it wouldn't be bad to sleep in a bed! Or in a house, or even in a jolly little tent like yours!"

With some hesitation I offered him half the tent for the night.

"Oh no, thanks," he said, "it would be frowsty for two. Of course, if you'd like to try how jolly you feel after sleeping outside, I don't mind."

That night he slept in the tent, and before we reached the coast my health was much restored by the open-air treatment. He also saved me the embarrassment of always sending him a formal invitation to dinner by offering to help with the cooking, and then staying just to taste the result.

So we had a pleasant time, but when we did reach the coast it was different. The new railway refused him work, and he went out with his empty little sack to starve among the thorns. There I found him a day or two later, when I had induced an engineer to take him on as a ganger. "That's good! That's good!" he said. But in the evening he came and explained that he didn't want to hurt my feelings by refusing the job, but as a white man he couldn't command natives without a decent shirt like that (he pointed to one of mine that was hanging up);

and besides, he didn't like stooping down in his present clothes.

He went away with my two last flannel shirts and my spare serge suit, and all was well till a British tramp steamer put into port, trading up the coast. Then he came to me, looking more trustful than ever.

"Didn't I always tell you," he said, with the conviction of faith, "that I'd be all right if I got to the Gold Coast?"

I replied he certainly had often told me so, and I hoped he would soon save enough off his wages to pay his fare.

"Wages!" he cried, with an idealist's impatience. "What's wages? For ten pound I'm there! Ten pound, second class, on this tramp, and I'm there! Now, it seems to me you'd feel much happier if you knew I was successfully started on my career. I put it to you as man to man, wouldn't you feel happier?"

He was a thrifty man. He didn't take a second-class ticket after all, but went steerage, and spent the difference on three bottles of whisky and a tin box to put my clothes in. The last thing I saw of him he was standing at the bow, with eyes fixed on an imaginary Gold Coast. But now and then he turned and waved me an affectionate adieu with my hat.

As for his name and nation, he habitually spoke of himself as Mac.

XXXI

HIS FIRST VOYAGE

To Mr Clarkson of the Education Office it was a moment of great mental excitement. The ship was entering the Straits of Gibraltar. Other passengers, proud of nautical experience, had repeated since breakfast that she was making for the Gib. To Mr Clarkson she was about to pass between the Pillars of Hercules. All his life he had longed to sail that classic sea, to behold the coasts that Virgil knew, to touch the very waves once ploughed by the keels of epic wanderers and heroes. Within the narrow length of that purple Mediterranean, all that was to him most valuable in the world's history had been thought or enacted. Outside the strict limits of its shore were uncouth things, unmeasured and unredeemed. Here was the one scene where human faculty had reached perfection ; here was the Mother Church of human intelligence, outside which no salvation could be found. On the one hand he now saw the red mountains of Africa, drawn like a veil before barbaric degradation ; on the other hand was Spain, and the city he called Gades, and the homes of shy Iberians. The sea was purple flecked with white. He was entering the very gates of a temple where every stone bore the touch of immemorial sanctitude. To him it was a moment of the highest mental excitement.

"Take your entrance for the sweep on the run?" said a Jewish voice close beside him.

"I beg your pardon. What sweep? What run?" said Mr Clarkson, with eyes fixed on the ghosts of Tyrian galleys.

"Two shillings for a draw in the sweep on the ship's run," said the voice. "I'm the auctioneer."

"Oh, if two shillings ends it," said Mr Clarkson with alacrity, "here you are!"

The voice passed on, and he looked along the deck. The first-class passengers, comforted by having emerged from the Bay, which Mr Clarkson thought of as the stream of Ocean, were stretched on deck chairs reading novels and magazines, and some of the ladies were doing fancy work, while stewards went from one to another offering cups of beef-tea to bridge over the yawning gulf between nine o'clock breakfast and half-past one lunch.

Turning to a dignitary of the Church who was reclining next to him, and from time to time explaining the points in "Tit Bits" to his wife, Mr Clarkson remarked: "If you had your choice, wouldn't you rather have been Ulysses than anyone who ever lived?"

"Ulysses?" said the clergyman with some astonishment. "A most unsettled life, if I remember right, and not altogether free from blame in certain respects which we need not further particularize."

"We are now," Mr Clarkson continued, "on the very scene of that passage which has always appeared to me one of the greatest in literature, where Ulysses called to his men not to die without knowledge of the unpeopled land beyond the sunset. 'Remember whence you are sprung,' he said; 'you were not born to live like cattle, but to follow valour and knowledge!"

—it is impossible not to add, ‘like a sinking star.’ And so they rowed on till night saw the other pole with all its constellations, and in the far distance a dim mountain appeared. Then three times round went their gallant ship, and the sea closed over them. Commentators always assume that Dante intended the Mount of Purgatory by that dim mountain, but really I see no sufficient reason to suppose it, do you ? ”

“ Ah, as to that,” replied the clergyman, “ I haven’t quite made up my mind yet about Purgatory. It is a point rather difficult of satisfactory solution. But you must excuse me from discussing it now, for between the eighth and seventeenth Sundays after Trinity I make a rule of allowing my mind to relax. Even the best field, you know, must lie fallow at times.”

“ Yes, indeed,” said his wife. “ I have to keep a careful watch upon the archdeacon. He reads and reads. He’s always reading, and even when he’s not reading he’s working his brain.”

“ Now, Mr Clarkson, I’ll take you on at Bull,” said the bright voice of the girl who sat next him at dinner. “ It isn’t Sunday to-day, so the captain can’t object to us taking up the deck.”

“ ‘ Considerate la vostra semenza :
Fatti non foste a viver come bruti. ’ ”

Mr Clarkson repeated to himself, as he began to throw flat discs on to a board marked with numbers. “ It is really Virgilian. But then I have often thought Virgil was not properly a Roman poet, but the first Italian.”

“ Oh, Mr Clarkson,” cried the girl, “ you’ve got a Bull instead of ten ! Now you’ll have to go back to

the very beginning. Hooray! I mean, I'm so sorry!"

But Mr Clarkson had ceased to play. The great mass of Gibraltar was just becoming visible as they rounded Tarifa. There it stood, dim in misty heat, shaped like a couchant lion, true doorpost of the ancient world.

"Rotten hole!" said the young man beside him, carefully adjusting his Zeiss glasses to look at it. When he had gazed for a time, he put the glasses carefully away and again said, "Rotten hole!"

"You mean it is no longer invulnerable, owing to the increased range of artillery?" said Mr Clarkson; "but I should have thought 'rotten' too strong a word to express the situation."

"I mean it's a rotten hole to be stationed in," the other replied with some asperity. "No sport, barring a bit of fox-hunting in the cork woods, over there."

"Spanish foxes any good?" said an elder man, turning his glasses to the woods indicated, as though expecting to see the Spanish foxes running about. "Poor sport these foreign foxes seem mostly. Not had the training of our foxes at home."

"It is doubtful how far acquired mental characteristics are hereditary," observed Mr Clarkson, not wishing to be excluded from the conversation of sportsmen.

The older man looked at him for a moment, and then slowly repeated, "Foreign foxes not had the training of our foxes at home. Same with dogs. There's no man in the country works so hard as an M.F.H. Always training, training, training. Always looking after this and that. No end to his labour. Perhaps he gets six weeks or so clear from middle of May to end of June. Then he's at it again practising

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the puppies. Talk of labouring man! My word, a labouring man isn't in it with an M.F.H.!"

"I've always heard that sporting hounds are peculiarly unintelligent," said Mr Clarkson, sympathetically.

"Unintelligent!" growled the older man. "My word, I'd rather be a hound than an archbishop! Wouldn't you, sir, wouldn't you?" he asked, defiantly.

"Well," said Mr Clarkson, anxious to soothe, "the choice had hardly occurred to me before, either contingency appearing so remote. But, no doubt, a hound's existence has its compensations."

"Rather be a hound than an archbishop!" repeated the older man, moving slowly away. "By Jove, I should rather think I would!"

"Oh, look!" cried Mr Clarkson, eagerly, "a flying fish! What a glorious creature! Isn't it like a Japanese toy?"

"Don't think much of sea fish," said the young officer. "They're no better than rabbit-shooting."

"But how marvellous that extension of fins into wings!" said Mr Clarkson. "What a pity mankind didn't follow the same process, and develop wings instead of arms!"

"Oh, we're good enough for most people as we are," said the girl, throwing down the Bull discs and walking away.

In the evening the great rock stood black and solemn as they slowly left it behind, and the light on Europa Point was greenish white against the sunset. The passengers celebrated their first concert on board, followed by an informal dance. During the concert a lady who had become conspicuous for leaving scent bottles and shawls on various chairs, fixed her fervent eyes on Mr Clarkson while she sang:—

"Less than the dust upon thy chariot wheel,
Less than the rust that never stained thy sword."

"I was sure you loved music," she said, clasping her hands as she sat beside him afterwards.

"I do indeed," said Mr Clarkson. "I like Bach best, because his music is that of the morning stars when they sang together. But I enjoy even comparatively inferior compositions like the thing you sang so well just now. While I listened it set me wondering.

"Wondering? Oh, wondering what?" asked the lady, with half-closed eyes.

"I was wondering," he answered, "how far it was possible for a lyric poet or composer to express a dramatic situation so entirely alien to his accustomed surroundings. It is a question that really involves most imaginative work."

"Oh," said the lady.

"It is the same with dancing," Mr Clarkson continued, as the band struck up the first waltz. "Originally, I suppose, it was a dramatic expression of triumphant joy or yielding and peaceful emotions. I often wonder how much of those feelings are retained in its present form."

"Don't you dance?" asked the lady.

"It is one of the great regrets of my life," said Mr Clarkson, "that I was not allowed to learn."

"Oh," said the lady, and her partner led her away.

A man came and informed him that a hotel in Jamaica was the best place to go to if you wanted to be done well, and that he himself would once have gone to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico had not the ship been made of Swedish steel. Escaping with the silent wish that Swedish steel had never been invented, Mr Clarkson sat long in the bow and watched the dark

water of that historic sea, while over his head Orion and all the ancient stars moved in their courses. But, though surrounded by the long-expected scene itself, he was somehow restless and uneasy. The throb of harp and fiddle reached his ears, and his spirit kept time to the rhythm of the dancing feet. The memory of some peculiar scent seemed to hang about him. When he tried to see only the Pleiades, he saw a woman's eyes intently fixed on his, and a hand resting upon the arm of a chair. He several times repeated the great salutation to Italy in the Georgics, and then, feeling a little calmer, he thought he would go to bed, as it was getting quite late.

The dancing had ceased some time before, but as he went down the deserted gangway he heard footsteps pattering after him.

“Please, sir,” said a panting steward, “there's a lady passenger on the companion would like to speak to you a moment.”

Mr Clarkson's heart gave one great leap. Never had he run so fast since he won the Consolation Race at school. She was standing at the top of the stairs.

“Is it possible?” he gasped. “Did you send for me? The steward told me you wanted to see me. Perhaps you've lost something?”

“Oh, no, no, no! Not *you*! Not *you*!” she cried, and vanished.

As he brushed his wavy hair before getting into his bunk, Mr Clarkson perceived that it might now almost be called grey, and somehow he could not recover his first joy in the memories of antiquity, though he heard the Mediterranean herself lapping against the ship's side till he slept.

XXXII

THE HEART OF ENGLAND

IF you would know September, go to the country where last month's rain is still uncertain whether it will flow into the fatted Thames and the ocean that is made in Germany, or into the faery stream of Severn and the depths of the Atlantic. The grandfather of the oldest villager could remember most of that country as forest land unenclosed. There is no heather, but many of the fields are still full of furze, and the isolated little hills that mark its surface are often covered with ancient trees. As you pass into it from the north or east—say, from Northampton or the meadows above Oxford—from hour to hour you become conscious of a change, a whisper of promise, a touch of distant enchantment, as when a child in a train first catches the smell of the sea. But perhaps one must have been born in the dulness of Leicestershire or Essex really to know what joy lies in the first sign of a rock projecting from the earth, or a frond of fern that is not bracken. To one so born no hurried rush into the central Alps can give as deep a delight as those faint evidences that he is going westward, and the mountains cannot be so very far away.

There the ancient forest country lies, the water trickling down its gentle valleys, usually to the Thames, but sometimes with a chance of escape to the Severn. . It is a Midland country, and there is no-

thing in the least melodramatic about it. The regretful admission of a recent patriotic poet of Kent would be equally true of its acclivities :—

“ You are not great, O hills of Kent,
That is to say, in height.”

The trees are not of wild and storm-driven kinds, but solemn hedgerow elms and rounded oaks, all growing their very best and fullest. The sheep are no fugitive creatures, alert as conies among the rocks, but solid, large-limbed animals, deep in wool and habituated to man. The rocky skeleton of the land is mostly covered with layers of soil and grass. Even at Swalcliffe, there is no cliff at all, but only a green cleft between rounded banks as green. Yet to the man who can hear the calling of the wilderness a hundred miles away, there lurks beneath it all that sense of magic, of inexplicable possibilities, and sudden transformation. More placid-seeming streams could not flow than Churn and Coln and Swale, but look into them, and you will see a swirling current, clear and deep almost as a mountain stream. Surely there is a wildness about the hedges, and the faces of the velvety sheep show a trace of black.

Day after day the sun now rises there red in mist. A heavy dew lies on all the grass and trees and brambles ; the surface of the road is damp and brown till you turn it up and find the powdery, white dust below. When the sun mounts higher, the distance still remains dim with haze, but the moisture dries, and the whole land lays itself out to bask in warmth. The late harvest is hardly yet gathered ; the corn-shocks stand in the field, and the stubble still is white, ringed round with poppies. Fruit hangs ripening in rather neglected orchards, but it is too early yet

for the sound of its falling to the ground. Against every cottage gable, or long front wall, the apricots and pears and yellow plums are sucking in the sun, clustered thickly together. For the villages have been built long ago of warm, deep-orange stone dug from the little hills and quiet slopes that shelter them. They have stood for centuries almost unchanged around their brown churches, proud of their towers, their spires, and the marble tombs of the gentry. The very names tell of ancient life before the country was quite tamed down. Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Bourton-on-the-Water, Fenny Compton, and Bampton-in-the-Bush—what pictures of wintry isolation and lonely streams lie in the very sound of the words! In Sheepscombe and Wincot (where Marion Hacket kept an alehouse once), we hear again the calling of flocks driven to new pastures. In Chipping Norton, Chipping Warden, Chipping Campden, we hear again the chaffer of human voices over lucrative exchanges of wool and turnips in cheapingsteads such as William Morris used to dream about from Hammersmith and the smoky town.

A heavy, unemotional people we imagine those people to have been, slow of speech and movement as their children are still. Typically English, one would call them, and with no intent to flatter, now that poor Old-English Freeman is dead, and all our fancy dwells on Frank and Celt. But their country hangs on the borderland between the commonplace and the wild, and into their solid flesh the seething leaven of something strange and uncertain has passed. Among a patch of rocks are heard "the Whispering Knights"; a rudely carved stone is still "The Bloody Warriors"; in the forest of Arden it was

not surprising to meet a lion, even before menageries were known ; and for the very romance of their sound, the names of Traitor's Ford and Battle Bridge have for centuries survived all memory of the bloody deeds that gave them. How did the Upper and Lower Slaughters win their fame, and what gave distinction to Stoke Lark and Compton Scorpion, that the two neighbouring manors should bear such opposite titles ? On the brow of Edgehill stands a farmhouse inn, like the " Point de Jour " on the upland of Gravelotte, and there must be some queer sense of beauty in the people who persist in calling it Sun Rising instead of Rising Sun.

Even among the gentle folk of the land there has been found the same twist or tang of something unexpected and incalculable, something just different from the solid, stolid sense, that illumines the House of Lords and once was England's pride. Their homes stand firmly here and there upon the country, with a look of immortal possession. Probably they are the most beautiful houses ever grown on English soil. Old Wroxton, Stanway, Broughton, Charlecote, Compton Wynyates—they seem to have sprung as naturally out of English life as hunting or cricket. We should expect the people who have dwelt in them to personify all the English qualities—the distrust of enthusiasm, the terror of theory, the satisfaction in detail, the worship of the high hat. So they have done, and so, no doubt, they do still. But now and again, like the rock that underlies the fat turf of their grounds, that touch of wildness has just cropped out, and they have dreamed dreams, joined rebels, studied books, claimed brotherhood with the poor, and flung their lives away for causes not their own. It was at Fiennes's house of Broughton that Pym, Hampden,

Vane, and other leaders of the early rebellion gathered to discuss the hopes of freedom, with less conquering resolution certainly, but also less acrid righteousness than afterwards came from the flat lands further east. It was at Great Tew that Falkland held a little court of scholars, drawn there by affection for a man of "such vast knowledge that he was not ignorant in anything, yet such an excessive humility as if he had known nothing." It was from there that he continued to ingeminate peace, and in clean shirt started to his death, as it were by suicide, in the fight of Newbury. And was it not the living owner of Compton Wynyates who defined "three rooms and a cat" as the minimum claim of the London working-man?

Under the September sun, the land lies brooding in a silence that can be heard. The central ocean is not so silent as is the street of Epwell, bright with stocks and asters. In these villages the generations of man have been quietly nurtured by the earth herself. Here the children have come to the birth unhurried and untormented by a mother's work in mills. Here they have drunk from deep breasts, and grown up day by day in the face of sun and wind. It is from a stock like this that we may expect an outburst of radiance if for a moment that incalculable, inexplicable fire in their blood is kindled. The leaven seethes, the promise of the wilderness is fulfilled, the sudden miracle is accomplished. Ah, but it is not a matter of hope and conjecture now; for set in this land is the very shrine of genius. Here the great miracle of England's story has already been performed. Here the dubious English nature, which it is the fashion to despise, was once transfigured into glory, and the sign-post points along the dusty road to Stratford.

XXXIII

“THE CROWD PROFANE”

SHUDDERING in every nerve, with windows down and door fast closed, culture sat nursing despondency. It was Bank Holiday, and, like Maeterlinck's *Melisande*, culture was not happy. It seemed impossible on Bank Holiday to burn always with the hard, gem-like flame, to maintain that ecstasy which is success in life. Outside, the big, open common roared and blazed. Bells clanged, and whistles hooted; a mechanical band brayed out the “Zuyder Zee”; a steam organ blared “Married to a Soldier,” as the wooden horses, winged with petroleum, charged round their penny circles. From every side rose clamorous warnings of fleeting opportunity. Three shies a penny! Here are the cocoanuts all in a row. Here you can shoot a woolly, wooden rabbit as it runs. Here you can win a singing canary by throwing a disk. Here a negro from African forests sticks his head through a sheet for you to bombard with wooden balls that make his cannibal skull pleasingly resound. Here spangled skirts and tossing feet indicate the prowess of the Amazon Queen, who fights with lions inside. One of the lions has devoured three men. Out comes the Queen herself, bearing in her arms a baby lion cub, irresistible to mothers! Or would you see the giant sewer-rat that eats the scavengers of Liverpool? Behold it, then—a large Australian rodent! Or, perhaps, your flesh will creep at the

savage alligator of the Mississippi reposing in his tank ? There in a saucerful of water you have an eight-inch African lizard, longing for the desert sand. And here is a shivering little jerboa—"half bird and half mouse," culture's Browning called him. But we go two halves better, and, "unprecedented monster, half bird, half rat, half lion, and half kangaroo," is his pedigree now, as he stares at the golden eagle that only the other day carried off a child from a distracted mother's arms in the Highlands of Scotland. For a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.

Up go the swings, round go the horses, the skipping-ropes click against the boards. Opposite each other, with serious faces, the girls display that newest of steps which flickers like a sword, or a snake gone mad. The common gleams with flags and gold. Striped booths of scarlet and white, brilliant as in Spain, flow with "tea and minerals," and heap up their bread and cakes, winkles and whelks, oysters and pigs' feet cold. Round the public-houses the air is thick with beer. Over the common the moving crowd is crammed together—black and purple, crimson and green, or white and yellow, with feathers and paper hats. The people of the city have forgotten their toil ; they have forgotten yesterday and to-morrow. Fathers, mothers and all, they are children again. They see the world as children see it—as everyone would like to see it—full of strange beasts and strange adventures, full of glorious sports, and whirling horses, and lots to eat and drink—an open-air world, shining in scarlet and gold, overflowing with kindness and dancing and joy. To-day they are happy and stamp the ground. They change each other's hats for love. Linked arm in arm into chains, they sweep yelling along the road :

“Hullo ! Hullo ! Hullo !
It's a different girl again !
Different eyes and different nose,
Different face and different clothes.”

Culture could not choose but hear, and shuddered, nursing despondency. Alas ! the music flayed the skin ; the style was like the sharpening of a saw.

But what was there in that song—what was there in the whole scene, that modern culture, sitting with windows closed, could neither receive nor give ? Mr J. A. Spender, in the “Nineteenth Century,” once asked the same question of literature. The people, he complained, is estranged from literature. The good writers run off into hole and corner styles and subjects. They write for “the elect,” for the few, the fastidious, the seclusive. They drift away from the main stream of the world's thought, and their influence never reaches the body of the people at all. One may agree that the danger is real. If you wish nowadays to drive a poignant insult into anyone's heart, call him “a literary man.” Consider what mean and despicable characteristics the phrase now conjures up—what over-sensitiveness, what hesitation of will, inability to act, shrinking from danger and from contact with the dirty world, what fugitive and cloistered virtue ! Many years ago, Mr Balfour was engaged, as sometimes happens, in a political controversy with an opponent, whom he could not confute by any argument. “I knew Mr So-and-so as a writer of verse,” he said, and no further argument was needed. The whole British nation felt at once that an opponent who wrote verse could not be considered seriously. When Mr Oscar Browning was standing for Brixton, and had just been defeated, a woman of the crowd put her head into his carriage

window and, after accusing him of every natural and unnatural crime, flung at him the final taunt of "Poet!" Her mistake was uncultured, but her triumph over the vanquished complete.¹

It was not always thus. Certainly, no writer or poet, no artist of any kind can ever move the working mass of mankind like striped booths and dances and whirling round-about. His appeal can never have the directness of reality and personal delight enjoyed at first hand. He can never know the happiness of one who has led a forlorn hope, or with his own right arm emancipated a nation. We remember what culture's Cleon wrote to Protus in his Tyranny :—

"I can write love-odes ; thy fair slave's an ode,
I get to sing of love, when grown too grey
For being beloved ; she turns to that young man,
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship ; well, thou art king."

Art, being necessarily unreal, necessarily a phantom of reflection, cannot hope to rival the grip of flesh and blood—the intense moments of passion, or danger, or excitement, or personal joy. And with regard to literature, we must remember that, though in certain classes the English are probably the greatest readers in the world—though by the habit of solitary reading we are losing our sense of sound and our power of converse—yet the working-classes do not read much ; the classes, I mean, to whom each halfpenny counts as money, to be spent only on necessities, or on pleasures that are real and unmistakable.

But yet in other times and other countries the power of the word was not disputed. We need not go back to

¹ Mr Oscar Browning has corrected some particulars of this story, but I much prefer the above version, as he first told it me,

the well-worn days of Athens, when the people thought their greatest poet would naturally best command the fleet. Take the last hundred years alone. Our "precious" critics have long made little of Byron, because his verse was seldom faultless ; but hear the passage that Mr Spender quotes from George Brandes—

"What language ! What tones breaking the death-like silence of oppressed Europe ! The political air rang with the shrill notes ; for no word uttered by Lord Byron fell unheard to the ground. The legions of the fugitives, the banished, the oppressed, the conspirators of every nation, kept their eyes fixed on the one man who, amidst the universal debasement of intelligences and characters to a low standard, stood upright, beautiful as Apollo, brave as an Achilles, prouder than all the kings of Europe together."

On the tomb of the most victorious Emperor no such splendid epitaph could be inscribed. Wordsworth, though he lived aloof among the moorland poor, has so permeated English thought that even our legislation takes a Wordsworthian hue, and tries to save the peasant and his mountain plot. Dickens has not only altered our whole conception of the poor ; he has redeemed the child-life of Europe. Tolstoy has restored the value of the soul, and made empires look ridiculous. When Victor Hugo died, the heart of the French people lay buried in his grave.

None of these men were perfect artists ; none were in the least "precious," or fastidious about form. But they had all one great quality in common ; they were all possessed by a vast purpose which an irresistible inward power drove them to fulfil. They had not time to pick and choose so carefully ; they had no need to go searching in holes and corners for curious and esoteric themes, for neuropathic instances, for freaks without legs or without decency. In all the

great arts that move mankind there appears to be a certain genial carelessness, a vehement exuberance, a regardlessness of criticism, an impetuosity that is often outrageous. But the saving grace in all these great writers of their times was not their carelessness, not even their fertility, still less their wide circulation, in which excellence may have no part at all. It was that they had something to say which they felt to be enormously important, and that they were right in thinking so. They moved with their time, and were one with the world around them. To them the howling crowds upon the common were no less human than the exquisite inventor of marble sentences in the twilight.

We need not despair. There are English writers still living who have accomplished a similar service. Nor need we join Mr Spender in urging the younger men to emulate this grand fertility, to be less careful of their reputations, and more prodigal in their gifts. These things cannot be forced; they do not come even by prayer and fasting. That breadth of humanity which restores greatness to literature depends on the time as much as on the men. It appears in times of intense struggle and magnificent hopes, in times of peril and change and upheaval, in times that call for life-and-death devotion. If our time in England is not like those, we must wait. Perhaps the change will not be long in coming; and when it comes we shall wonder at our despondency and solicitude and fears, for the greatness of literature, as of life, will have been restored.

XXXIV
:
"MY HOLIDAY BOOK"

FOR me this was a difficult subject, because I had no favourite book, and no holidays. During ten years I had not been a day in London without work of some sort, and I had never left London, "except on business"; or only once, and that was no holiday, because the Boer war tormented us all.

But certainly I had travelled about a good deal for months and years in the course of business, and had read a good deal, especially on board ship, so that as far as reading goes I might call my journeys a holiday time. To fix on a favourite book was more difficult. It was impossible. One book succeeds another according to a man's growth, just as one friend or lover succeeds another. At different ages, or even in different moods, the same book has not the same value. Coming back to a book to which I was once quite indifferent, I often find it full of glimmering lights and miraculous revelation, while from other books all the light and joy and mystery have died, and, though I may admire them still, I have not the least desire ever to read them again. They are wrapt up in beautiful shrouds, with rosemary and spices, and over each is written the inscription, "Sacred to the Memory." Many living people have that inscription written over them, too.

At one time I should not have hesitated to call "Sartor Resartus" and "The French Revolution"

my favourite books. In my youth Browning also was like a new dispensation. I learnt "Faust" and the Book of Job by heart, and read everything Dante had written with intense delight. To all of these, and to the Greeks, I still turn with pleasure whenever I happen to meet them, and sometimes I think they have much improved since I knew them first. To others whom I used to like well enough, such as Thackeray and Kipling, I can only give that helpless salutation of old acquaintances: "Hullo, what are you doing now?" and pass on. I am recklessly inconstant, and that I loved a book once is no reason at all that I should love it now. On the whole, perhaps, I have been most constant to the big, coarse humorists—men like Aristophanes, Rabelais, and Falstaff. Into their society I can always return with the best assurance of welcome. I used to put "Tristram Shandy" at their side, but I see now that he has suffered a little from his refinement and literary qualities. Closest of all to my heart, and most intimate in every gleam and shadow of love and hatred, and in every phase of the war for freedom, Heine whispers and sings.

But on a journey or a holiday I should not take any of these people with me. I know them too well. On a journey I demand freshness of adventure from the dark, broad seas of glooming thought. To return to old familiar scenes is always melancholy, and out through the Pillars of Hercules I would follow the sinking stars. Chance will do much, and often in the doldrums of a steamer's library I have discovered a fairy island entered on no chart. Sometimes a book hitherto only known for its fame may suddenly rise close at hand, like Teneriffe, whose summit one may easily miss through not looking high enough. Very

often in a desert hut I have found a volume which I have possessed for years unread, and the mood or the moment, or merely the scarcity, has made it exactly right.

But I am not a good reader. I should rather do almost anything than read, except write or speak. Certainly I can read most things, except fiction, with pleasure. Fiction is either unnecessary or overwhelming, and to read a great imaginative work like "Diana of the Crossways" or "Tess" or "Jude" or "Anna Karenina" or the other Russians shatters existence. Under their influence one can neither think nor live.

Being modern and close at hand they are more terrible, and more heart-rending even than the "Agamemnon," in which the highest power of pity and terror seemed to have been reached. But to me, as to one of Ibsen's heroines, reading generally appears irrelevant and out of touch with life.

I admit a certain charm even in the irrelevance, and there is pleasure in the violent contrast between a book and reality. In the disappointment and chaos of the Greek war I found a new delight in Omar Khayyam. On a dangerous and degrading service during the Spanish war I saw all manner of fresh divination in Wordsworth. In Ladysmith I rediscovered Shelley, and even read a few pages of "Daniel Deronda" with pleasure. In long wanderings on the veldt I enjoyed a guide-book to the Rhine, and it was a peculiar delight in passing through Mozambique to find a full-blooded Zulu reading St Cyprian in the original, and to discuss it with him. In Macedonia, just after the massacres, I read much of Byron again. On the West Coast of Africa I met two men who admired Boswell more than anything, and we recalled Johnson's great sayings all night.

On the long watershed between the Zambesi and the Congo I picked up bits of Pope and Emerson and Dickens in a missionary hut, and appreciated them more than ever before. During intervals of the revolution in Moscow I was reading Anatole France. In the Caucasus one winter, and among the devastated villages of Georgia, I had somehow got hold of "Les Misérables" again. Wherever I go I think the "Ancient Mariner" keeps humming in my head, like a perpetual tune.

For those who, like myself, have a love for literature, but a genuine fear of its paralysing fascinations and intoxicating effect upon the soul, I can only feel great pity. Abstinence will not help them, nor will moderation. If they mix largely with action and with interests not concerned with literature at all, they will find their craving and their power of enjoyment only increased. Yet, perhaps, that is really the best thing they can do. Action gives a penetrating insight into the value of words, and, after all, it is better to be wildly drunk with thought or beauty at rare intervals than to go fuddling oneself day and night in the tap-room of a library. So if ever I had a holiday, and felt the craving for literature, I should try to get hold of a book that would keep me alert with new spiritual adventures and intoxicated with new perceptions as with new wine.

XXXV

THE SUDDEN SPLENDOUR

It was an old assumption of the logicians that man is a reasoning animal, and the faith still holds together, though crumbling. The appeal to reason is still respected, and to call a demand unreasonable closes the pockets of men and nations. Yet it seems as if the true test of personality lay outside reason, and the quality of one who has followed only reason's guide is unproven and unknown both to himself and others.

One week in December 1908, everyone was reading of a young woman who sprang from a train after her baby which had fallen out. The baby was unhurt, the woman was killed. Nothing could have been more unreasonable than her act. If anything, she had less reason, poor woman ! than most mothers to save the child, for she was not married. Yet her life was of some value to herself. She was a domestic servant going to her parents for a holiday. Doubtless, she enjoyed life as much as most people, and there was not the smallest call for her to throw it away. What good did she hope to do for the baby, who, if it was to die at all, would almost certainly die with the first crash upon the ballast beside the rails ? If it was killed, she would be too late ; if not, there was no need to jump after it. She had better have stopped the train by pulling the cord. Put the case at its best, and suppose there really

was some chance of saving the child's life by the desperate leap ; still the sociologist would urge that in the interests of the community a mature young woman with an intelligence cultivated by the church or Board School at considerable expense—a young woman whose food and clothing had cost a good deal of hard-earned money, should never have exposed herself to the uneconomic risk of death on behalf of a pulpy quasi-embryo, whose food had been milk on the cheap, whose clothes were trivial, and whose education had not cost the State a farthing.

Not only individual, but social unreason was here seen at its lowest. Had the action been concerned with anything less than life and death, what exclamations about the stupidity of women and the lower classes we should have heard ! “ Oh, Susan,” her mistress would have cried, “ what *are* you doing ? Can't you ever stop to think ? ” And the professor standing by would have remarked how slowly education penetrates the average intellect, or have consoled himself with Mr Havelock Ellis's scientific deduction : “ Poets have racked their brains to express and account for this mixture of heaven and hell. We see that the key is really a very simple one ; both the heaven and hell of women are but aspects of the same physiological affectability.” As for the wasteful expenditure of a highly developed existence in exchange—and that a needless exchange !—for an inchoate and hardly conscious congeries of protoplasm, we remember the scene after Nevil Beauchamp had cut short his career just at its highest in rescuing a smudge of a boy :—

“ Dr Shrapnel's eyes and Lord Romfrey's fell on the abashed little creature. The boy struck out both arms to get his fists against his eyelids. .

“ This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp !

“ It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him.”

“ Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all ? ” said Lear, and it is the question one always asks when a noble life is thrown away ; for the equation of existence never works out right. We ask that question even when there is some excuse for the wastefulness of life—some accepted reasonableness in the call of duty or fame or the praise of onlookers. We ask it when the powder bags are laid at the Cashmir Gate of Delhi ; or when Mackworth of the Queen’s walks up the bullet-swept edge of Wagon Hill with a penny cane in his hand to encourage the terrified men behind and is killed alone ; or when the grey-bearded body of De Villiers, commandant of Harrismith, is found leaning over the British sangar at a range of two yards. History is full of such things, and King Lear’s question always rises to the mind. The only person to whom it does not occur is the person most nearly concerned. When the policeman in the House of Commons was quietly carrying out the live bomb that shattered him, he did not say to himself, “ Why should a dog, a horse, a Member of Parliament, have life, and *I* no breath at all ? ”

These actions are beyond reason and calculation, nor does their splendour depend in the least upon success. When Rome’s greatest treasure flung himself full-armed into the abyss, he did not know for certain that the earthquake chasm would close above his head as a most fitting burial. When Katherine Douglas became Kate Barlass, she did not know

whether her arm shattered in the bolt would save the King ; nor did it. When Alice, the Southwark nursemaid, carried the children one by one from the fire, she did not know till she died at which child she should die. The miner whose story came from British Columbia in Dec. 1908, knew it was useless for him to stay with his comrades when the roof fell, but he stayed to die. Some years ago, in one week at Leicester a porter, springing in front of an express to save a baby, was cut to pieces, and a woman was seen carried down the flooded river holding her child with both arms high and dry above her head. In one case the child was saved, in the other the mother was found with her arms still outstretched, but the child's body was miles away, among the reeds. There is no calculation, no possibility of estimate in these things. They are outside the domain of reason and the principles of economics. Successful or unsuccessful, they all rank the same, or if there is any difference, those that can be attributed to the recognised dictates of duty and good conduct, like the soldier's or the policeman's are esteemed a little lower than the rest.

Does it not seem as though reason had very little to do with the glory of personality ? The quick crisis, allowing no second for thought, tests the whole nature to its fibres. It comes suddenly as a shell that scatters the limbs of men before they know there is danger. In a flash the moment arrives and is gone, but by the flash the recesses of the soul are displayed. It is written that the woman who hesitates is lost, but the word is equally true of the man. To hesitate is in itself to be lost, for the moment never comes again, and by that hesitation all the man's commonplace qualities are exposed as in a gallery of stupid

idols. But regardless of thought and chance and time, to leap hot-blooded into deed—that sheds a sudden splendour, rejoicing mankind as they grope their way among the visible darkness of systems and philosophies. For the quick illumination reveals a nature that repays the groaning and travailing of creation's pangs, and when Sarah Jane Wood, on her way to Shrewsbury, jumped from a train in the utterly useless and unreasoning attempt to save a baby, her crazy action proves that her spirit was loveable and fine throughout. It was the only kind of spirit that makes man worth the trouble he has caused.

But if we give an honour surpassing all other praise to such deeds as hers, why do we so calmly condemn a man or woman who, in the moment of burning crisis, falls short of her heroism? If we reward these things with exceptional glory, we should surely be lenient to the ordinary behaviour which we may assume would be our own. But we are not lenient. We are savage in our rage, and vengeance. Loukeria drove in the sledge between the Russian pines, her children warm against her breast. The padding wolves followed close, and one by one she let her children drop. In reason there was nothing else to do; better that one life be saved than that brood and mother and all be lost together. We must assume that we should have done as she did, for with what divine honour her fame would have been celebrated if she had tucked the babies under the rug and flung herself to the wolves, no matter how vainly! We should then recognise her action as something beyond ourselves, sometimes almost super-human. Yet the average man stands quietly by while Ivan Ivanovitch swings his axe and off flies her head, amid general

approval. "It had to be: I could no other: God it was bade 'Act for me!'" he says, as he wipes the axe on a bit of bark, and we regard his claim to be God's executioner as quite justified, though it is our own necks that he really severs.

Those who stand so quietly by and exclaim, "Quite right, Ivan! you're the proper sort of man!" have never known what fear is. They have never faced that moment of extremity when fear sips the life-blood, and the throat is dry, and the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, and life is so dear and the horror of annihilation has come within a stride. Till he has faced that moment, let no man breathe a condemnation or act God's headsman. For no man knows what he may do when the heart fails for very terror, and the secrets of the soul are revealed. Of all the virtues, there is none so treacherous as courage, none so uncertain a possession. Yet we have no mercy on the man or woman whom it fails. Is there then no mean between divine honours for the brave, and that swinging axe for the average mortal? Man is not a reasoning animal, and, to his eternal credit, there is no mean. But the Ivans among us might remember that, if things came to the supreme test, it is the axe that nearly all of us would deserve.

XXXVI

THE ANARCHIST PLAY

It was a strange contrast that was presented in the chalk-pit of the Bradfield College Theatre one Saturday. The temperate English sun shone his best, and a sweet-smelling wind just rustled the woods of June. Thrushes sang in the thickets round the topmost seats, house-martins flitted over the orchestra, and under the heavy oaks of the park the tame deer stood browsing like cattle in the chequered shade. Smooth cricket-fields and close-clipped lawns, and old buildings of red brick told of fatted peace and immemorial comfort. Clean and well-fed boys were there, instructed in unhesitating obedience as the primary rule of life. Men and women sat in the audience who had never transgressed a human law, nor questioned the ordinances either of rulers or of society, but were taught to regard rebellion as a capital crime. Few of them had ever been called upon to risk so much as a hat for a principle. Fewer still had ever dreamed of missing a meal for the possession of justice or of love.

But before their complacent eyes was enacted the sternest tragedy of rebellion and justice and love, and upon how different a scene! It is war-time at its most loathsome moment—two days after battle. The plain of Bœotia is scorched with heat. Dust storms go sweeping in darkening clouds over the gravelly hills round Thebes. The dead of the de-

feated Argives, who had tried to carry the city by assault, are being hastily buried in the sand and rocks outside her seven gates, and already those that remain exposed are blackened by death and the sun. The smell of their putrefaction poisons the air. The street dogs and the vultures of Cithæron are at work upon them, and fragments of their flesh and bones are strewn through the town, even upon the altars of the gods. Among them lies Polyneices, slain by his brother, who himself was slain by him—ill-fated offspring of hideous relationships. Let others be buried as time may allow; such was the sacred custom among all Greeks, for death brings forgiveness to mankind. But for Polyneices no burial shall be permitted. His body shall never rest in the purifying earth, but, torn by birds and beasts, shall rot in sun and wind and rain, unwept, un comforted, and unhallowed. Such was the decree of Creon, who had claimed the kingship of Thebes upon his other nephew's death. The law was confirmed by a proclamation ordaining in legal jargon that any person or persons found attempting the burial of the aforesaid corpse by digging, covering, sprinkling, or any other form of interment whatsoever, should be liable to the penalty of being stoned to death in any such public place as the law directed. A guard is set to watch the body. Loyal citizens tremble and obey.

On such a scene the great drama of rebellion opens, and Antigone enters, resolved upon her holy transgression—Antigone, the same high-hearted girl who had once guided her blind father to the olive woods of white Colonus, whence Athens can be seen. At her side the poet places her sister, the pretty, comfortable Ismene, just as in another drama he places a gentle

sister at Electra's side for the type of an average, easy-going mind that acquiesces in authority and carefully keeps within the law. Ismene pleads all the common arguments for doing nothing; the thing is impossible, she says; "it is no good starting on a wild-goose chase"; it is always a pity to make a fuss; works of supererogation are uncalled for; besides, the sisters are poor, weak women, both too weak to strive with men; and then, surely it is the duty of every citizen to obey the State, and no one can be reproached for submitting to superior force. But, come what may, she will at least keep her sister's secret—oh, she may be trusted to do that!—and, with a final touch of human nature, she insists that it is for her dear, dear sister, not for herself, she fears.

It is the same with the Chorus. Kindly and well-meaning gentlemen, they are blinded by the dull caution of age and custom. They are abundantly sympathetic; they feel keenly for everyone; tears stream from their eyes when Antigone is led to death; they do their utmost to console her on the ground that it is a fine thing to die young and healthy; and we can imagine their well-bred start of shocked surprise when the ungrateful girl rejects their consolations as a mockery, and asks them at least to have the decency to hold their tongues till she is gone. Why, it is decency they live by—decency and the law! They have been nurtured on their favourite saying, "Nothing out of the ordinary comes into man's life without bringing a curse." And so, although they admire man's cleverness very much, and wonder at his skill in sailing the sea, and ploughing the earth, and taming the horse, and protecting himself against rain and frost and disease, they are terrified out of their wits at the thought of a man's or woman's

daring, and only pray that no one who disobeys the law may ever sit beside their hearth. So with love; they say many beautiful things about it—things that have flown round the world—but they are mortally afraid of it. There is something in love that makes light of laws, something excessive and immeasurable, and the heart possessed by love is no better than insane.

It is the custom to hold up Creon as the type of the bloodthirsty tyrant, the embodiment of capricious despotism. But that is unjust. He is only the average official, the common slave of law, order, and routine. In usual times he would have been regarded as a model ruler, always setting public interests above his own or his family's. There is no nasty nepotism about him, at all events. He is continually talking about duty and the State. He knows that the State expects every man to do his duty, and through all his words we feel what stirring speeches he must have made on Empire Day in Thebes. To the State he is devoted heart and soul, and in its service he will sacrifice all his natural affections. Though on these grounds he esteems himself a first-rate administrator, he palliates possible mistakes by the weary old saying that any government is better than none. His is not an exceptionally evil nature; it is only the official nature hardened by a crisis. His mistakes are the official's mistakes. If anyone opposes him, he at once suspects "sedition" or "corruption." He cannot imagine a man differing from him except for treachery or bribes. Rather than depart from law, he will welcome the desecration of altars by foul impiety; and, as the surest mark of the official mind, he is perpetually haunted by a peculiar abhorrence of anything so subversive of official routine as the in-

terference of women in politics. "No woman shall constrain a ruler's laws!" "Females shall have no vote while I'm alive!" Again and again he blurts it out with a persistency that shows how keenly the whole question was occupying the mind of Athens, as is also seen in the three woman plays of Aristophanes.

In the midst of all these worthy supporters of the law stands the rebel girl Antigone, the most heroic figure in Greek tragedy, or second only to the rebel Prometheus, who defied the decrees of Zeus himself. There are many underlying motives in the play—the position of women, the position of kings, and the "romantic" love between unmarried lovers, a motive almost unknown in Greek literature. But the great and central theme of the play is Antigone's appeal from the laws of State to the primal laws of righteousness which lie deep in the heart of mankind, unaffected and unrestrained by the panoply of ordinances that hedge rulers and their citizens round. The poet's art has diffused that irresistible appeal through the whole play, but for one moment it is concentrated in Antigone's celebrated lines:—

"It was not God who bade that edict pass,
Nor were such laws decreed for mortal men
By Justice dwelling deep among the dead;
And for your ordinance, it had not the sanction
That could compel us to override the laws,
The unwritten laws, divine, immutable,
That are not of to-day or yesterday,
But abide for ever, none knowing whence they sprang."

In these lines is hidden the secret of the strange and incalculable forces which ordinary, law-abiding people like Ismene and Creon and the Chorus find so disturbing and terrific. For these forces are the laws that have no letter, and to speak of keeping within

them would be ridiculous, for they have no limits and no pale. Custom, tradition, injunctions, and penalties cannot even enter into the region where they move, and duty has no part in them at all. For they are possessed of a transfiguring power, and under their radiance, duty shrivels to a dingy heap of rags.

These are the great, unconscious instincts of the world, the assured impulses that redeem mankind from hesitation and half-hearted compliance. Love is one, as the poet says, courage is another, and a third is that unlawful holiness which drove Antigone to defy the worst that the State and stoning and starvation and suicide could do against her. She is no iron-hearted woman. When she finds her brother's body laid bare of earth again we hear her cry "like a wild bird robbed of its nestlings." She longs for life and love and children, bewailing her virginity, as other Greek girls bewailed it. One line shows a peculiar tenderness for her lover, unusual in Greek. When Creon shouts he will have no evil woman wed a son of his, she only thinks of the slight put upon her lover in supposing his choice could be evil. But she wavers only once for a moment in her confidence of right, and it is significant that not only does she win the Chorus and even Creon to her higher faith, but all along, as her lover says, the common people were violently on her side, counting her worthy of golden praise. For psychologists tell us that women and the poor live always closest to the deep unconscious truths of the world.

XXXVII

“THE BACCHANALS”

It is the tragedy of the contest between two spirits—the spirits of moderation and excess, of good sense and enthusiasm, of established order and revolution. Many other mysterious spiritual laws and groping prophecies of things to come enter into the play—the symbolic significance of blood and wine, sacrifices of divine life and re-birth, the incalculable strangeness of man's double personality revealed by ecstasy or the force of a higher will, and the possibility of a god who is no thundering warrior, but a spirit of gentleness and almost womanly attributes. All these things are there, and I cannot in a page exhaust the meaning of one of the strangest and most subtle remains of Greek poetry. But as Prof. Gilbert Murray's version was seen at the Court Theatre in November 1908, the drama is the tragedy of that recurrent human contest between established order and revolution. By his arrangement of the final act Mr William Poel, who produced the play, appeared to insist on this. For amidst the woe of the mother's discovery that the lion's head she swings in triumph is her own son's, he boldly introduced the dancing Bacchanals still wild with inspiration; and he showed us the mother, Agave, seized again by the ecstatic influence and joining in the holy dance while, for good or evil, the new spirit goes marching on.

An incalculable power has entered a city unawares. Upon the habits of law and order and routine it acts

like a touch of leaven in a lump of dough. It reduplicates itself, it quickens, it stirs, it seethes, it permeates, it rouses, it defies all limits, it is like the kingdom of heaven. Sober citizens, accustomed to established ideas that broaden slowly down, are aghast at the rapid transformation. They feel puzzled and very much annoyed. Everything was going so comfortably and straight before ; the course of the city's progress was well marked out, and while she continued to prosper there was no reason why they should not eat, and sleep, and worship the gods as usual. Then came this blast of a new spirit, driving decent progress all athwart, upsetting the shipshape conveniences of life, and making everybody disagreeable. They try ridicule ("there is nothing so deadly as laughter") but the spirit only laughs back at them ; they lose their tempers and try abuse, but the spirit remains calm ; they talk of "stern measures," and "the iron hand" ; they surround the spirit with guards ; they crush it into prison cells like a common criminal ; but almost before they have turned the keys on the new spirit it is outside again. It is everywhere. Like the wind, it bloweth where it listeth. Stone walls do not its prison make. "Cannot God overleap a wall ?" asks Dionysus of the steady-going tryant, and the tyrant stood bewildered. For the first time he was confronted with the spirit of faith, a quite incalculable thing.

After all, Pentheus, the city's ruler, was but the average man of affairs, the ordinary governor or official, with a dislike of troublesome novelties. He reckons on the common motives of mankind for full explanation of this annoying movement. He attributes it to money and sensuality—the two motives to which all spiritual and revolutionary movements have from

time immemorial been attributed, and always will be attributed by people blind to spiritual things. Pentheus is not blinder than other men ; he is only just as blind. " Where is he ? For mine eyes discern him not," he asks, staring into the very face of the god. He is so blind that when, like all dull people, he cries, " This needs an iron hand," and swears he will bring the inspired women back to labour at his distaff, and strives to chain the god himself, he can but chain a bull in his place and goes hewing the empty air with his sword. It is the fate of all rulers who would suppress the Spirit by prisons and executions. They are left glum or foaming while the Spirit glides away. At the end of the play Dionysus himself utters one little sigh of lament over the common blindness :—

" Thus speaketh Dionysus, Son confessed
Of no man but of Zeus !—Ah, had you seen
Truth in the hour you would not, all had been
Well with you, and the Child of God your friend ! "

But from such natures spiritual vision is necessarily excluded. Professor Gilbert Murray has himself depicted their every-day type :—

" Those haggard, striving, suspicious men, full of ambition and the pride of intellect, almost destitute of emotion, unless political hatreds can be called emotion, were hurrying through Life in the presence of august things which they never recognised, of joy and beauty which they never dreamed of. Thus it is that ' the world's wise are not wise. ' "

In and out among these common examples of all governing classes the new spirit began to move invisibly, and Dionysus came to Thebes. The son of lightning came to his birthplace, and his birthplace did not receive him. It saw no use in his courteous ways, his indeterminate powers, and his symbolic gift of

the vine. Only an old man here and there perceived the hint of divinity in Semele's child (I translate the words of old Teiresias) :—

“ Who found the drink of the grape, and on mankind
Conferred a gift that banishes all their pain
When the wine-jar pours it out, and brings them sleep
And sweet forgetfulness of daily plagues, .
Nor is there any other drug for care.”

Of the wise and prudent only an old man or two discerned the newcomer's power. But to those who were not counted among the world's wise the new spirit was revealed. It swept into their souls like a flood of light. It brought with it that glory of incalculable things—that transfiguration of the squalid world, for which all men but worldlings long. At its coming, thoughts and lips were set free ; the stiff chains of the world were loosened, rocks and trees joined in reeling dances, obstinate nature relaxed her laws, snakes licked their human friends, and she-wolves brought their cubs to be nourished by women kindred to themselves. To those who received the new spirit no harm could come ; flames could not burn their hair, and before their faith mountains were removed and plates of bronze and iron were shattered. From the inmost dungeons of the oppressor they heard the voice of the Spirit calling them, and they answered. Force had no power against them ; the tyrant's own guards whispered that they were on their side, and only used violence under orders. For its worshippers the new Spirit had filled up existence ; it was impossible to imagine life deprived of it now. “ Oh, what was left if thou wert gone ? What could I but despair ? ” cried their leader. Without the new Spirit of freedom the world would be a blank—a foggy march from

which they had emerged into the sun. "What else is wisdom?" they asked, in those central lines of the play:—

"What else is Wisdom? What of man's endeavour
Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?"

Then comes the tragedy of all revolutions—the severance of closest ties, the sword that the new spirit brings upon earth instead of peace. The blind oppressor is overwhelmed by his own folly; the lion walks into the net; we see the mother's hands reddened with a son's blood, and she enters rejoicing in the trophy of her hunting—"bearing in triumph her own broken heart." It is a savage thing. Even the inspired Chorus hesitates whether to rejoice or mourn. Old Cadmus, the mother's father, who had himself been touched by the new inspiration, breaks down under the human pity of the sight, and will never be moved by the Spirit again. In Dionysus—perhaps in all these incalculable powers—there was always that double nature—that grim and terrible side. So sweet in manner, so like a gentle-hearted woman, yet he drove his worshippers to rend beautiful creatures in pieces, to devour living flesh, and brandish the bleeding limbs in the triumph of his revels. Heads borne on pikes, assassinations of governors when Bastilles crumble, September massacres—for such things there are tears, there is human pity. But the new Spirit passes upon its way.

It is commonly thought that the play was a typically Greek protest against excess—another illustration of the "Nothing too much" inscribed on Apollo's

Delphi. But it is impossible thus to limit its significance. As is well known, it was the last thing that Euripides wrote, and he wrote it in exile on the slopes of Olympus, looking over the bay to Salonica, where St Paul was to come in about four hundred and fifty years. It was a time of deep depression and disappointment, when all the bright hopes of Greece after the Persian defeat and of Athens under Pericles had faded away in political factions and civil wars. The poet may have intended his play only as a picture of certain spiritual results, without further conscious meaning. But still we may find in it the perception that the hope for mankind lay in a new afflatus, a devouring enthusiasm. Nor need the idea seem un-Hellenic in its obscurity and excess. Even Aristotle, whose search for "the Mean" is the text of our teachers, admits that all excellence is "in a sense extreme," and denounces those who warn us that, "being mortal, we must think only of mortal things." For what honour has the world ever given to a man who was merely "moderate" in love or in courage or in generosity, or in anything else worth having or giving? When a Scotsman told the House that his nation was generous, but tempered generosity with prudence, even that cautious assembly smiled, knowing at heart that, in the words of William Blake, "Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid, courted by Incapacity," and only by the road of ungrudging lavishness is life's greatness to be won.

XXXVIII

“VOTES FOR WOMEN”

IF courage could do it, Miss Elizabeth Robins deserved to win the vote for women. She achieved something which had never been even attempted before in the long traditions of the stage. She did not merely use the drama as a means of advancing a political or social cause. Others have done that, from the Greeks down to Gorky, though not so often as one would have expected, considering the drama's irresistible appeal. But Miss Robins boldly proclaimed her cause from a public platform to an audience on the stage, and with that audience she identified the whole theatre. I can recall nothing quite like it. Antony makes a great speech, which profoundly moves both his stage audience and the house ; but Cæsar has long been dead, and no one is seriously concerned in avenging his murder now. Dr Stockmann in “An Enemy of the People” proclaims a startling and magnificent principle to his townsmen, but no one in the house has any personal interest in the fate of a poisoned Bath in Norway. The nearest parallel I can think of is the scene in which Lysistrata addresses the women of Athens, urging them to compel the men to make peace. In that scene, Aristophanes was presenting the cause he had himself at heart, and the excitement which it aroused upon the stage was exactly echoed by the excitement it produced

among an audience, at that moment engaged in a prolonged and devastating war.

But the conception of the greatest of humorists was naturally humorous, and half in mockery. Miss Robins proclaimed her cause in speeches which began, certainly, under a humorous form, but were in deadly earnest throughout, and rose to a solemn and pathetic eloquence which was deliberately intended to convince the whole theatre, and held the house as silent as the crowd upon the stage. There have been few such pictures of reality as that crowd and the speakers gathered at the base of Nelson's column. If in a century's time, long after women have taken their place in the Parliaments of mankind, they wish to discover what kind of speeches were made by the early champions of their cause, what kind of people those champions were, and with what merry jests and irrelevant criticisms they were received by any open-air audience in London, they will only to have read the second act of "Votes for Women," and imagine it acted as it was played at the "Court." The acting of the whole scene, both of speakers and crowd, was one of the most remarkable performances in recent English drama. All were excellent—the working woman, the youthful suffragist, and the drunken voter; but Mr Edmund Gwenn as "Mr Walker" reached a level of comedy that we generally can hope for only from France.

The whole representation was almost too exact for what is called art. Many in the audience protested that for them it had little interest, because they were present at meetings just like that at least once a week. But this was the very thing Miss Robins aimed at. Her speakers at the foot of the canvas Column pretend to be arguing with the stage

crowd between them and the footlights, but they are nothing to the crowd, and the crowd nothing to them. It was to the actual theatre that the appeal was made. Like Hamlet, Miss Robins had heard that guilty creatures, sitting at a play, have been struck so to the soul that they have proclaimed their malefactions. To her the guilty creatures were men—the men who continue women's abasement by refusing them the ordinary rights of civilised countries, and the countesses, authoresses, and other women who protest they like it. It was with the play that she sought to catch their conscience—not with the mere similitude or mouse-trap of a play, but with the representation of the actual thing itself. People will go to an intellectually fashionable theatre who would never think of attending a meeting in Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square. They should be made to hear what the women at such meetings have to say. People who shrink from the vulgarity of crowds and shouting should see a shouting crowd while they sat in comfort, and without a stain upon their refinement. People who were rather inclined to think that there might be a sort of a kind of justice in a demand for women's suffrage, but could not endure the methods of those nasty, violent "suffragettes," with their legendary hatpins and spitting should at least see what the methods were, and hear what the "suffragettes" meant, while they themselves remained as free from the perils of hatpins or spitting as any policeman outside the House, or as any Member protesting inside that the British Parliament will never, never allow itself to be intimidated, though Miss Kenny were at the gate.

There are soldiers who have no idea of the events or significance of battles in which they have been

present until they read the accounts of correspondents, or see the illustrated papers. The drama has the same power of revelation. A man may go through a hundred public meetings and never perceive the humour, or pathos, or seriousness of one ; but in an accurate reproduction of any ordinary meeting on the stage he will understand them all without mistake. We must leave it to the æsthetic critics to explain why that is—why it is easier for nearly everyone to recognise the meaning of common reality after it has passed through another's brain—why thousands of kindly people should have contemplated negro slavery day by day for years without emotion, and then have gone mad over "Uncle Tom's Cabin." The reasons are very likely abstruse, but there is no question of the truth, and it is this truth which Miss Robins used for her pamphlet play. With just that additional advantage, she pleaded her cause as from a platform. She used the beauty and dignity of Miss Wynne Matthison, who played the woman-speaker driven to utterance by her own and woman's wrongs, but it was Miss Robins herself who spoke, and the theatre became a public meeting listening to her words, but just raised to sympathetic emotion by art.

It was a great and powerful experiment. Those who did not sympathise with a cause would probably call it dangerous. At all events, it was new ; and it was not the only new line that Miss Robins entered upon. In the ordinary dramas that people know, I believe there are about seven that could be called "woman plays"—plays in which the main theme is the relation of women to men as inferior, or equal, or superior, in political or other kinds of wisdom. All these previous plays, whether by Aristophanes, Shakespeare, or Molière, have been satiric, and have

made women the objects of ridicule, against whom the laugh of the audience is supposed to turn. The laugh has nearly always been indulgent, and the poets, being humorists, were nearly always manly and generous. In their hearts they knew the woman's side. Aristophanes, with all his laughter, comes very near the modern woman's demand, when *Lysistrata* thus begins one of her speeches to the citizens :—

“ Gentlemen, in former times and former wars,
 Whatever you did, we bore it patiently,
 And hardly whispered, though we hated it.
 But, sitting quiet at home, we often heard
 Your silly decisions upon things of state,
 And, grieved at heart, we smiled our woman's smile,
 And asked politely : ‘ What's the news to-day ?
 What's done in Parliament ? What hope of peace ? ’
 And, like a man, you'd say : ‘ What's that to you ?
 Hold your tongue, can't you, woman ! ’ And I did.
 So worse news came, and worse decrees, and worse
 Decisions, and we fawned on you and said :
 ‘ Dear husband, what's the reason men are fools ? ’
 But he, with sidelong glance and sulky brow,
 Growled at us : ‘ Woman, stick to your stitching, please ;
 Stick to your stitching, and leave war to men !
 Stick to your stitching, or I'll break your jaw ! ’ ”

Molière shows the same sympathy when, in “ *L'Ecole des Femmes*,” Arnolphe pours out to Agnès his great series of man's precepts for women, beginning—

“ There are two halves in human society,
 But these two halves have no equality.”

Yet in all these previous plays the main object and result was good-humoured laughter at women, and satire of their ideals and pretensions. But with all her wit and humour, Miss Robins was not laughing,

and the satire is quite on the other side now. It is the lion now that is painting the picture of the lion-hunt, and man can hardly be expected to enjoy it much. Miss Robins based her appeal upon the deepest realities of womanhood, and, throughout the play, the audience felt the working of that personal intensity of conviction without which the methods of art can lead to little better than amusement. Under the stress of conviction like that, a drama cannot be criticized on the lines of ordinary plays; for it rises to a place among the human forces that slowly move the world.

XXXIX

THE COMPLETE ANARCHIST

TOWARDS the end of Kropotkin's "Memoirs" there is a remarkable description of the change that he found in England, on his second visit in 1886. During his first visit, only five years before, he had felt an exile indeed. No one took the smallest interest in the questions which alone interested him. Social thought, so active in this country during the 'forties, appeared to have died of dull contentment or despair. There seemed no one to whom he could ally himself, no one to whom he could turn for sympathy or co-operation in the social aims on which his life was concentrated. Being at that time strange to the English language and people, he was wrong, for in that very year Mr Hyndman founded the Democratic Federation, as I think it was then called. But still, it would be hard to exaggerate the astonishing change of the next few years, for during them a true revolution in thought was set on foot, and we are living upon the impetus of that revolution now.

The appearance of a new collection of Mr Edward Carpenter's essays and verses ("Sketches from Life") recalls us to those eager and adventurous years, when, if ever in our history, our young men dreamed dreams and our old men saw visions. For his was among the most hopeful and stirring voices of the time. He knew more than other people, and he wrote the very best prose, though, to be sure,

those advantages are never necessary to salvation. He was one of these highly educated, middle-class people whose presence in the social movement Kropotkin notices as almost peculiar to England, and he brought to the question something of those "general principles" in which the Russian found our people so lacking, compared with other races. But it was not his knowledge nor his prose nor his general principles that gave Edward Carpenter so strong a hold upon the social enthusiasts of the day. The secret of his power over their affections and convictions was that he lived the life he taught.

"This noble ensample unto his scheep he gaf,
That ferst he wroughte, and after that he taughte."

There lies the touchstone that discredits sounding brass, and even if Edward Carpenter had possessed none of the other advantages I mentioned, this would have sufficed him for followers.

To be sure, he was followed in all manner of queer ways, whether of dress or food or farming. It is so easy to emphasize the unessential, and become a ritualist in fads. But if some people made too much of his saying about the little toe, and counted sandals for salvation; if some people insisted too apostolically on the rival advantages of seeds or leaves for human diet; if some took too literally his advice in favour of an occasional debauch, and saved themselves from self-righteousness by spending a Saturday night in the gutter; if most of the communistic farms have ended in charming failure, none of these things matter very much. People might have taken to worse, as Mrs Carlyle's servant said of two maiden ladies and religion, and certainly no one who lived through that time of gay and devoted experiment

will account mere failure any reason for regretting the years. I speak in the past tense, not that Edward Carpenter's influence has passed away ; I have found it from the Peak to the Caucasus ; but that first fine careless rapture of the 'eighties we shall not feel again, and the spirit was the thing.

In economics he was ordained to heretical succession by Ruskin. He was not so fine in spirit as his master, not so pathetic in yearning indignation, but full of hopes and more pugnacious. "England's Ideal" and "Civilization: Its Cause and Cure" were his heretical books. In them he brought to bear on modern life a criticism as penetrating and revolutionary as Ruskin's own, and more plain-spoken. It was through evidences of physical and spiritual sickness that he opened his attack. The very numbers of the doctors for body and mind proved what invalids we are. Crawling phenomena like policemen showed the rottenness of our state. Compared to the cat, we are degenerates of nature, who have lost our unity, our integration. Compared to the fox or Bushman, how self-conscious, distracted, and ugly. Even our moral sense, that perception of sin which we boast as distinctively human, goes with a certain weakness, and as to our way of life, he wrote of the civilized man :—

"He disowns the very breasts that suckled him. He deliberately turns his back upon the light of the sun, and hides himself away in boxes with breathing-holes, which he calls houses. . . . He muffles himself in the cast-off furs of the beasts, every century swathing himself in more and more layers, till he ceases to be recognizable as the Man who was once the crown of the animals, and presents a more ludicrous spectacle than the monkey that sits on his own barrel organ."

But the return to Nature and the beauty of the

savage had been proclaimed by many voices since Rousseau's, and, from America, Whitman's barbaric yawp had sounded over the roofs of the world.

“ Do the feasters gluttonous feast ?

Do the corpulent sleepers sleep ? Have they locked and bolted doors ?

Still be ours the diet hard, and the blanket on the ground,
Pioneers ! O pioneers ! ”

The glories of Nature and the simple life had been sung before, and they have been since repeated, almost to satiety. The distinction of Edward Carpenter's teaching was that in the years when dogmatic Socialism was sketching out its phalansteries and piecing together its rather inhuman machinery of by-laws and regulations, experts and officials, proletariats and doctrinaires, he almost alone among the leaders of social thought stood firm for liberty. His protest, indeed, lay not only against a centralized Socialism, but against Government and Law in general. Most of us are content to accept Government for fear of what might happen else, and to accept Law as a shorthand summary of public convenience—a rough summary but passable. But Carpenter would hear nothing of external Government and external Law, so continually at variance with the internal powers that alone inspire great action. Compared with those powers, all the common aids to decency and duty, such as laws, judges, policemen, prisons, experts, officials, and inspectors, appeared to him hindrances to be abolished. With his own teacher, Walt Whitman, he said :—

“ Where the men and women think lightly of the laws,
Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending
audacity of elected persons,
There the great city stands.”

"External law," he proclaimed emphatically, "must always be false."

In the history of man he could discover no permanent code of moral action. He attacked the customs and habits which blind and bind us, as earnestly as he attacked the Criminal Statutes and the folly of prisons. Even the Decalogue, that most reformers allow to pass, did not escape him :—

"The Decalogue, he wrote, may have been a rough and useful ready-reckoner for the Israelites ; but to us it admits of so many exceptions and interpretations that it is practically worthless."

We may call him the Complete Anarchist. In the anarchy of individualism he goes further even than Tolstoy, for he demands a faculty of antagonism in a man, so that the full value of personality may be preserved. Among merely unselfish people he finds a certain dullness, a kind of charity which is really parasitic and lives on the objects of its pity. To the passive resister he replies that turning the cheek to the smiter only encourages smiting. A Communist in society, his real object is not the community or the State, but the noble personality, "untamed, untranslatable," as Whitman said :—

"O I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you . . .
I am larger, better than I thought ;
I did not know I held so much goodness."

That is the ideal of life to which Edward Carpenter has pointed us with all his power of thought and word and life—an ideal of true Democracy, as he calls it, in which External Government and Law will give place to Internal Government and Order. Before that stage is reached, when mankind will have passed beyond our dreary region of duties and rights, there

is, he admits, a toilsome and long ascent to be made. We are grateful to him for that Pisgah sight, but here we are struggling as best we can upon the toilsome and long ascent. Man, we know, was made only a little lower than the angels, but we do not seem to be catching them up very fast.

XL

THE LAND OF LIBERTY

THERE is something poignant in the very smell of Russia. To cross her frontiers from industrious, well-arranged Germany, where health and happiness are laid down in the Imperial regulations—to enter the mouth of the Neva from the Swedish doll's-house and toy farmyard, is like going into a prison. Hopelessness is written over the gate, and as you pass through the corridors and cells of the country, there rises the sense of forgotten suffering, of human tears, and immemorial wrong. On every side the vast landscape stretches out, flat and indistinctive. You feel that, in whichever direction you may go, there will be no change in that scene for hundreds and hundreds of miles—nothing but that expanse of land, flat to the horizon—an expanse where a river bank becomes a cliff, and a rise of a hundred feet an event in a day's journey. Here and there the surface is marked with strips of thin cultivation. You see the draggled huts of a village, unknown and unvisited as a Central African kraal, and in spring or autumn the shaggy peasants are wading about in the mud, or in winter-time in the snow. Or it is a small town, and from the middle of its hang-dog streets rises the big white-washed church, with a roof of pale green iron plates, a blue or brazen dome, and at the top the Russian cross, having a bar for the Crucified's

Feet, with one end higher than the other, because the Russian Christ was lame.

So to the traveller the scene goes on—a succession of plains and wastes, and unvaried forests and God-forsaken villages, and poverty-stricken towns and muddy people, green with famine, or spitting out the husks of sunflower seeds, their only luxury but drink—until the monotony of its depression is almost unendurable, and one would say of the whole country that melancholy had marked it for her own. Yet there is no land, not even Italy, to which the thoughts of exiles turn with greater longing. “It is all very well,” said the Russian lady who refused to die after seeing Naples; “it is all very pretty, but it is not Siberia!”

Perhaps it is near daybreak in midwinter, and the sledge is struggling eastward under transparent darkness. It emerges from the streets of an ancient town into the open country, like a boat clearing the harbour, and every minute the east grows paler, and the snow whiter, till, at the first ray of sun, for mile after mile, the lines of hardly perceptible ridges suddenly glow with crimson, and, as the sun moves westward, low down above the horizon, all the world, except the brown and blue forest, turns to shining silver. Or it is spring, and the birch woods are alive with young leaves, though the freshness and the smell of half-melted snow are still upon the air. Or it is June, when night is white, and the whole land for a thousand miles is sweet with the smell of the hay; and as one stands under hardly visible stars and listens to the silence of night’s little sounds, the spirit of Russia becomes a thing that can be felt—as palpably felt as the Egyptian darkness. Or, passing down the stream of the Volga, you may

tie up for the night and come upon a scene like this in Yaroslav :—

“ I went ashore, and walked about the streets of the quiet city ; a sleepy town, with trees and grass everywhere (the trees very dark in the twilight) ; the houses low, two-storeyed, and all painted white, with pale green roofs as white as ghosts in the dusk, ornamented with pilasters and eighteenth-century and Empire arches and arcades. Every now and then one came across a church, with the remains of the sunset making the gilt minarets glisten. The whole was a symphony in dark green, white, and lilac (the sky was lilac by now). The shops were all shut ; the houses shuttered, the passers-by few. The grass grew thick in the cobble-stones.”

The picture is from Mr Maurice Baring's new book of sketches—“ Russian Essays and Stories ”—not so substantial and thoughtful a work as his “ Year in Russia,” but distinguished by the same fascination and sensitive personality. There are few English people who can grasp, as he does, the double nature of the Russian scene and the Russian spirit. This description of Yaroslav, for instance—how pathetic in its remote quietude and dying lights ! But perhaps Mr Baring remembers how different was the look of Yaroslav only some two years before, when those grassy streets were thronged with black crowds of men and women yelling in triumph for liberty, chanting the Russian “ Marseillaise,” hailing the downfall of tyranny and capital, while officials and employers cowered in their cellars, or slunk away in three-horsed sledges by night, galloping for their lives to far-off Moscow, the very railways and posts being in the hands of revolution.

A double-natured land—a double-natured people, as Mr Baring has well perceived. Many who hear the name of Russia think first of the gaol, the torture-

chamber, and the execution yard. That is the land where the despot is hanging the noblest of his subjects by a hundred a month, and massacres are carried out to time like business transactions. That is the land where the greatest of living writers calls to the Government to put the hang-rope round his old neck because he can endure the horror of the execution no longer. That is the land where the finest intellects of the country, men and women alike, are sent in long trains with grated windows to rot in unknown deserts; where peasants, men and women alike, are strapped barebacked on benches and flogged without mercy, because they cannot pay the interest on French and English loans; where boys and girls and famous men are sunk into the oblivion of prison for months and years without trial. Young men and young girls will there destroy the agents of tyranny with less apparent emotion than we feel in drowning kittens, risking every pain and dishonour that man or woman can suffer. On both sides the contest is carried on with a violence that varies chiefly according to the power of inflicting it. It is a land, also, where "Tsar Hunger" reigns—a fitting home for Gorky's desperate wanderers, and the poignant sorrows of Andréeff. Peasants in the lust of thrift or passion will there contrive the obscure abominations of the "Powers of Darkness." As Mr Baring tells, they will publicly strangle a mother's only baby on pretence that it is Antichrist. They will form themselves into monstrous sects, whose orgies of lust and blood cannot be described. Brides will let bridegrooms find them hanged above the bed. Men by thousands will so despair of life that they take vows never to reproduce it. Peasants will light a fire under a horse's belly or

gouge out an eye to make it draw a cart from the mud. "It is enough," said the dying Basároff, first of Nihilists, when Anna came at last to see him; "it is enough—now darkness." The darkness, without that satisfaction, might seem the natural character and end of all Russian life.

Yet there is no race in the world so merciful, so full of pity, none in which the simplest and deepest feelings of mankind play so powerful and unaffected a part. If I should choose the one characteristic that more than any other distinguishes the Russian people, it would be pity. Here and there in Europe one may find pity too. Schopenhauer, in his philosophy of sorrow, counted pity the chief of virtues. Thomas Hardy, from the inner knowledge of sorrow, watches the course of mankind with the Spirit of the Pities. But in Russia, filled so full with man's sorrow, the pity is unconscious and universal. It is as natural a part of the race as its hair, and all possess it, perhaps even the Tsar. To a Russian the most savage criminals being taken to gaol are "the unfortunate." No beggar is ever refused in Russia; from the hungriest, and even from the richest, door he is never turned away empty. "Why should the rooks die? They have a right to live," cried the villagers to a shooting party, and nearly killed the sportsmen. In his last book Mr Baring told of peasants incited to the destruction of their master's house and the plunder of his goods, and how they replied, "He is rich and would suffer if he became poor. We are used to poverty, and must have pity on those who are not used to it."

This peculiar sympathy pervades the whole of Russian life. It is as though every man and woman

were indeed brother and sister, or, at least, some near relation, without the dullness of relationship. I suppose that in no country is equality so quietly accepted as a matter of course—not the mere equality of possessions, which could not make much difference, but the sense of equality in a common manhood. It is quite true that the educated people are very highly educated—that, as Mr Baring also notices, their ideal of “culture” is something far beyond the range of our public-school and country-house people, and that in art and literature and music Russia is now leading the world with yearly increasing influence. But, none the less, there is no great gulf fixed between the educated Russian and the peasant’s mind. Of what other peasantry in the world could it be said that their favourite reading is a prose translation of “Paradise Lost,” because “a sweetness comes to you with it,” as Mr Baring told us in his “Year in Russia”? And both in the simple wisdom of their conversation, in their sad music, and the sudden tempest of joy in their dances, the Russian uneducated people seem to live, as it were, from a deeper level than others reach.

To live in common peril is of itself the surest equalizer. Whether the danger be poverty, famine, war, imprisonment, or execution, does not much matter. There is no true comradeship and no true testing of a man without danger, and it is, perhaps, in the school of danger and misery that the Russian people have learnt their characteristic pity for the miserable. It is in the school of danger that the educated Russians have learnt the politeness of equality, and a freedom of social intercourse that English society has no conception of. Thus out of the eater cometh forth

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meat, and in the land of despotism alone is liberty to be found. "You talk a great deal about freedom," said the eighteenth-century Frenchman to a lady; "but where have you found it?" "Only in the Bastille," she replied.

XLI

THE HUMANIST

WHEN Oxford dons tell us of the "learning more humane," and extol it as the best education their University can give, we contrast it in our minds with "science," and attribute to them a fastidious prejudice against frogs and lice. But, in its origin, the humanity of their learning was not opposed to the knowledge of nature so much as to the knowledge of God, and it was maintained as an alternative to theology rather than to physics. For when the phrase first appeared, even the wisest had not yet begun, like Sir Thomas Browne, to question nature why it was that elephants, having no joints, could never sit down, or that basilisks shot venenation from their eyes, while salamanders enjoyed life in the flames, or that peahens were ashamed of their legs. But upon the supernatural mysteries of essential reality and worlds unseen the mind of Europe had not ceased to speculate and dogmatize for over a thousand years, taking the divine learning as its sole, though infinite, province. Even when a writer so humane as Virgil was held in memory, it was as a soothsayer that he was honoured ; and he served as guide, not to the fields of his own Italy, but to circles of Hell and spirals of slow purgation.

How the revival of learning rose like new sunshine over the face of Europe is a familiar story. The mere study of Greek and Latin writers promised a deliverance as from haunted night. It was pursued with a

passionate enthusiasm such as generations of grammar on school benches have made it hard for us to conceive. The ancient literature—the learning more humane—hovered before the grasp of those early scholars as an alluring vision. To them it was like the face that launched a thousand ships. Chilly and grey and despairing of eternal truth though they might be, surely with a kiss it would make them immortal. Like all genuine passion, their zeal transfigured their souls, so that they grew nobler than themselves. Learning became amiable, and books a school of manners. The spirit of Europe appeared to shake off its gloomy terrors and reconquer for itself an ancient freedom, full of promise and glad adventure in regions to which the blithe doctors of “Humanism” pointed the way. It was in Italy the stir began; but within fifty years all the West—even to the Thames and Forth—was a-tiptoe with excitement.

Among this group of eager Humanists, side by side with Erasmus himself, it has always been the custom to place George Buchanan, hailed by his contemporaries as the first poet of his time, and by his countrymen as the model and founder of Scottish learning. We may say of him that by universal consent he was worthy of his position had he remained unread. But, unfortunately, for his fame, the St Andrews people who were in 1906 celebrating the quatercentenary of their University and his connection with it, have issued a jointly-written volume as a memorial in his honour, and the task is executed with such Scottish thoroughness that our acquaintance with the man and his work has now become intimate. Like most intimacy, it is a misfortune. In his address upon Buchanan to the University that year, Lord Reay said: “We can only

think of granite in connection with such a heroic figure"; and no doubt it is very difficult for one distinguished Scotsman to think of another distinguished Scotsman without the thought of granite. But after reading this elaborate biography and summary of the man's works, it is not a granite character that rises before us. He was imprisoned by the Inquisition in Portugal, but he abjured his errors, and suffered nothing terrible. He wrote about the rights of the people against the Crown, but he waited till the Crown was weak and discredited. After composing his best Latin verse in praise of Mary of Scots, and acting as her tutor, he turned violently against her in her distress, and is suspected of forging the evidence that brought her to ruin. A contemporary of Knox, he mentions him only four times. A poet of astronomy, he devoted his verse to a denunciation of Copernicus. A reputed reformer of religion, he stood aside from the main controversy of his time. He was fifty before he considered the Scriptures seriously, and nearly sixty before he joined the Reformed Church in Scotland—over forty years after, as Montaigne says, "the new fangles of Luther began to creep into favour." It is not of granite that such a man is made, even in Scotland, where granite is plentiful.

But I do not wish to discuss either his politics or his religion now. A contemporary Scotsman summed up his attitude to those sides of life much better than Lord Reay. "He had good religion for a poet," wrote Sir James Melville. It was only as a Scottish-Latin poet that he was known to the Europe of his time. He was a Humanist, a master of Latin, reported to be the greatest writer of Latin verses in the world. Even a modern commentator has said of one of his odes that it would be impossible to show more

elegantly how Horace ought to be imitated. At his touch everything was transformed into Latin verse. He was not a great scholar and emendator of manuscripts like the Scaligers, but Joseph Scaliger admired his verse. He was no Grammarian to gather all that books had to give and "settle hoti's business," but he made the Psalms of David look as like Horace as is possible. He was a schoolmaster and private tutor of uninspired morality and some slight tendency to the Puritan, but he spent much of his life in composing erotic verses that were thought almost good enough for Propertius or Ovid himself, and upon Scriptural themes he founded Latin tragedies in the style of Seneca.

His gift and his fame illustrate the time, and so, with a kindly glance as at a mummified curiosity, we might leave him if only his influence had followed his works into oblivion. But unhappily it is exactly Buchanan's kind of Humanism which has exercised the strongest effect upon our literature and life. Other Humanists have saved themselves, like Milton and Sir Thomas Browne, by innate splendour of thought and style; or by humour and breadth of sympathy, like Rabelais and Montaigne. But to Buchanan and his fellows we owe all the paralysing falsity that invoked the Muse, the Pierian spring, Venus, Cupid, Jove, Cynthia, sylvan solitudes, the Penates, and the charms of Chloe. For nearly two centuries after Buchanan's death those tiresome fictions lay like a dead hand upon the heart of our literature and kept it cold. It was not only that the well-worn classic symbols were false to our national life, as false as a conqueror's language. There was a more pestilent falsehood in them still. It is seen in the Memorial's apology for Buchanan's erotic verse :—

“The laxity of expression which such poets allowed themselves in verses dealing with that evasive and illusive subject, woman, does not imply that the writers were themselves lax in their morals.”

The author of that sentence does not perceive that the only excuse for such verses would be the sincerity which is the only excuse for any verse. If Buchanan's Latin verses about Cupid's darts and Lâlage's cruelty expressed his own feelings they would at least possess a certain personal interest. But when a rather starchy Scotsman deliberately sets himself to compose wanton odes as a fashionable exercise in expression, the thing is too stupid for indecency ; and for a sin against the Spirit no defence is needed, because no forgiveness is possible.

Yet Buchanan's Humanism, and no other, has been the base of our highest education for nearly four centuries. Our study of the two noblest languages and literatures of the world has not aimed at the appreciation of literature or at the science of language. It has aimed, as Buchanan aimed, at the means of expression and the practice of imitation. Masters have been obliged to teach the only things they knew, and, under the consecration of time, master to master has handed on a torch that was not the torch of life. I know all that may be said for the Humanism of verse-making, for instance, in which Buchanan especially excelled, in spite of his false quantities and weary tags. I know that a few men have thus enjoyed a fine perception for language and a certain imaginative exercise. But the ideal set up by this kind of Humanism is either false or lopsided. It is an ideal of literature and not of life, of expression and not of action or reality. The minds that most excel in it are rarely the men who ultimately excel. They

are easily beguiled by phrases and feigned emotions. They believe too much in the power of the word, and if they have made a brilliant speech or written a brilliant book they think all is over but the shouting, unconscious that the work has hardly then begun. They are children in matters of high enterprise, and in times of depression or defeat they croak like lonely ravens. At the best they continue driven about like Cicero by hesitation and vanity upon the course of life. For they can hardly believe that the art of literary expression, in which alone they are masters, is in itself almost powerless for influence, and that the literary emotions they have laboured to express have no more to do with passion than Buchanan's erotics. It is true that the subjects taught in schools are of trifling importance compared to the manner of the teaching. But the inspired teacher is very rare, and if the kind of scholarship rendered fashionable by Humanists like Buchanan has blighted our national literature by false ideals of imitation and perverted our national life by false standards of power, there is no need to join in any Horatian ode to the honour of its founders.

XLII

HIS FIRST SKI

MR CLARKSON was tremulously happy. It is true he was in an electric train, heated like a tepid Limbo, and he would much rather have been on foot or in a sledge. But he could not with decency take more than a fortnight's holiday from the Educational Office at this time of year without reducing the solid weeks of the summer vacation, when he intended to visit all the cathedrals in France. So for the sake of speed he used the train, and he tried to imagine it did not exist. Once in his boyhood he had been up this Alpine valley, long before the railway was made, and since then he had always desired to penetrate the Alps in winter. Surely something of that old mystery, that sweet remembered passion of delight must linger about them still! Though in an electric train, he was now penetrating the Alps, and it was winter. He was tremulously happy.

At Geneva a driving snow had hidden the distant mountains, but he was among them now, and the clouds were fading away in transparent film, allowing the morning sun to gleam upon sudden visions of snowy crest and brown precipice, unimaginably high. At their foot the long slopes of pines covered the buttresses of the central chain, and in front, among the snowy fields, were huddled little villages of wooden houses—mere human dwelling-places with roofs for covers, but full of contrivances against the cold, and

fitted with lofts and storerooms for the food of men and cattle. Here was the scene that Mr Clarkson had loved from boyhood ; here were the mountains, woods, and streams which had haunted him like a passion. " The walls of lost Eden," he quoted to himself, from Ruskin's first sight of the Alps—" The walls of lost Eden could not have been more beautiful to us ; not more awful, round heaven, the walls of sacred Death."

And through the wild glory of mountain and cloud he heard more plainly than in boyhood the still, sad music of humanity. Here were the barriers of Europe, enshadowed still by the memories of heroes and peoples and moving hosts. Here were the places of which poets had sung, and in these solitudes they, too, had found for their hearts a savage consolation. Here the shy peasantry had lived for freedom, in gloom, but also in glory ; and in these habitations, almost as unchanging as the mountain heights, they still lived on. He tried to recall the noble lines beginning—

" Two Voices are there ; one is of the sea,
One of the mountains ; each a mighty Voice."

But before he could get the third verse right another voice by his side suddenly exclaimed : " It's simply outrageous ! "

The speaker looked up defiantly from his paper, as though daring the eternal heavens to contradict him. " Only a week ago," he cried, " I had a letter in the ' Times ' protesting against the abominable misconduct of the railways to Switzerland. My own sister-in-law had registered her luggage through from here to Victoria, and though she had time to drive across Paris and have breakfast at the other station, that luggage missed her train, and she had to wait two and

a half whole hours for it in London, though she lives at Harrow ! And here's a man writes to-day to say she was lucky not to have to stay a whole night in Paris, as his aunt did ! Now, can you imagine anything more scandalous than that ? ”

“ Perhaps it was not so terrible as it sounds,” said Mr Clarkson, soothingly.

“ Sounds ? ” said the man, with rising fury. “ Why, it's perfectly atrocious ; it's almost inconceivable ! Do you know there have been whole columns of complaints about these things in the ‘ Times ’ for weeks past ? We English people—we who come here for our holidays and bring money into the country—are we to be treated like dogs, losing our luggage for hours together, missing our trains, having our female relations stopped for whole nights in Paris ! No matter ; I shall write to the ‘ Times ’ again the very moment I've had something to eat.”

Mr Clarkson expressed his approval of the intention, and had just recovered the two lines—

“ In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty ! ”

when the train drew up at his station to a blare of bugles. It was the village band, reinforced by the military, who had come to welcome the heroic winners in a bob-sleigh competition against a neighbouring canton. Passing under a triumphal arch of ice, frozen upon a foundation of wire netting, the heroes were conducted to the Mairie, where Mr Clarkson, as he turned into one of the large hotels, heard the Mayor discoursing to them upon glory, and caught the words of enthusiastic promise : “ Un concours monstre, colossal, de skis, de luges, de bobs sera créé ! ” He discovered afterwards that the Mayor was also Pre-

sident of the "Comité de Tourisme Hivernal," and that by his enterprising organization of "Sports d'hiver," he had raised the number of visitors by nearly three thousand in a single winter.

Coming in just for the end of the déjeuner, Mr Clarkson found long rows of English people at one table and long rows of "foreigners" at another. Nearly all were dressed in white woollen jerseys turned down at the throat, and all had white woollen caps which the men tucked into their pockets. To Mr Clarkson they looked like Anatole France's Penguins soon after their conversion.

"I think, after all, this is the most beautiful valley in the Alps," said Mr Clarkson to break the ice with the female Penguin next him.

"Not such good tobogganing as in the Rhone valley," she said, drawing on a pair of white woollen gloves that reached up to the pinion joint.

"Don't feed you so well, either," said a male from the opposite side.

"I was thinking of the peculiar beauty of nature here," said Mr Clarkson in self-defence.

"Oh, nature!" answered the man, less deferentially than Mr Squeers when he said "She's a rum 'un, is Natur'! I should like to know how we should ever get on without her."

"Do you ski?" asked the girl, fearing that the conversation was becoming dangerous.

"You mean sliding over the snow with long planks on your feet?" Mr Clarkson asked. "Well, no; I've never tried. But I see from the advertisements that on skis you have the high Alps at your mercy. I don't want to have the high Alps at my mercy, but how does one begin?"

"You must get a white jersey and a pair of skis

first, and, perhaps, you will find the sloping field at the back enough to start upon, without the high Alps," said the girl, and they went out laughing, the man lighting his pipe as soon as he came in line with the foreigners' table.

Mr Clarkson bought a white jersey, hired a pair of skis, and he did find the sloping field at the back quite enough to start upon. Hour after hour he shuffled and trampled up that slope, zigzagging painfully sideways with six feet of narrow board firmly strapped to each boot. If he attempted to walk straight up, the hideous things slipped backwards, and he fell forward on his face, straining his toes to breaking point against the straps, and only thankful that he escaped putting out his eyes upon the up-turned points of the skis. Having struggled up about a quarter of the slope, he waddled slowly round, like a huge web-footed crane practising the fifth position in dancing, and looked back. From that height the slope appeared much steeper than from below. It appeared almost precipitous. But there was no helping that. The moment he got the skis fairly side by side pointing downhill, they began to move of themselves, and everywhere the skis went Mr Clarkson was sure to go. They slid apart till his legs were like opened scissors. They clashed together; the points interlocked, flinging him violently on his head and again straining his toes till they almost cracked. They glided over an atrocious hummock that always threw him on his back. They acquired a detestable impetus that bore him towards destruction against a cottage wall. He could not guide, he could not stop. His only safety was to fall, and he dared not do it. It was like leaping from an express to escape a collision. Happily, the skis themselves

always brought him down long before the danger point, and with a sense of hairbreadth preservation, he found himself wallowing in the snow, only bruised and flayed, while, with these ridiculous planks kicking in the air and a spiked pole plunging about in his hands, he struggled to get up, as vainly as a cast sheep.

"Rather nice, isn't it? Don't you think it's rather nice?" said the girl, skimming past him as he lay once, and bringing herself up with the Telemarch turn. "And you're getting on splendidly!"

"Thank you," said Mr Clarkson, pretending he was only resting. "Certainly, a natural exhilaration is induced by every form of escape."

"Topping!" cried the man, as he rushed by and adroitly sat down sideways.

But Mr Clarkson, thinking enough was done for honour, turned to what he supposed the more peaceful joys of the toboggan. Having planted his little "luge" or sleigh at the top of the straight run home, he tucked the string between his legs, clutched the sides, and hoped for pleasure. But he found himself gliding downwards at a still more deplorable pace than on skis, though he jammed both heels hard down upon the course. He swung from side to side, he charged into the snowy barriers on either hand alternately. Splinters of ice, kicked up by his heels, flew into his face and blinded him. Covered with snow from head to foot, careless of time and space, he let the thing go its own way, and it went. Sprawling headforemost down the middle of the course, with blinded eyes, he just perceived it dribbling away to the finish, and then he crawled over the snowy barrier, barely in time to escape four men in a bob-sleigh who rushed past at a mile a minute, and took the final corner with bodies horizontal, parallel to the ground.

This experiment he tried twice more, while the mule was drawing the bob-sleigh up to the summit again, and each time he enjoyed that distinctly pleasurable sensation when at last the toboggan flung him off and he found himself still alive and almost unhurt.

"You'd see better if you lay on your stomach and went head first," said a sympathetic observer.

"No doubt you are right," Mr Clarkson answered, "but there is a limit to absurdity."

With some thankfulness he perceived that it was getting dark. The snow crunched with frost under his feet, and overhead the sky had turned to a deep blue, fading into green down the valley. In a cleft between the aiguilles one white star was already visible. But the highest peaks and domes of the mountains still glowed with the reddish brown and orange of sunset, though already there had fallen on them the silence of coming night. For a few moments still one aiguille flamed, and then all was cold.

"'God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,' " Mr Clarkson murmured regretfully, as he went to join the others in the English tea-room where they always gathered to discuss their prowess and their health. "Yes, it still goes on—the mountain mystery, the gloom, the glory, the evening glow, and the awful rose of dawn; and still it may be said that Nature never did betray the heart that loved her."

And as he dressed for dinner he read on a printed notice in his bedroom that all visitors would be charged twopence a day for the embellishment of the valley, thus ensuring beauty and comfort of the first order.

"I feel rather like Flora in 'Little Dorrit,'" he thought. "Her engagement to Mr Clennam—'it was the morning of life it was bliss it was frenzy it was

everything else of that sort in the highest degree.' And then her marriage with Mr F.—' only necessary to mention asparagus and it appeared or to hint at any little delicate thing to drink and it came like magic in a pint bottle it was not ecstasy but it was comfort.' "

" Comfort ? " he added, as he tried to sit down without pain and wriggle his toes into his dress shoes. " Well, I don't know about comfort ! "

XLIII

LIFE AND THE POET

AT the end of most lives there is a sense of incompleteness. How many possibilities unrealized, how many capacities unused! Whether we believe that the duration of the soul is infinite or not, we then feel that its powers were beyond calculation—its powers of pleasure and pain, experience and action. And when the end comes, how little has been done or suffered, how few the opportunities for the use of all that incalculable force! These are the commonplaces of life and death, but it may seem strange that the thought should be suggested by the final volume of Bielschowsky's "Life of Goethe."

For the attribute commonly given to Goethe's life is completeness. If ever there was a man who developed all his powers, received a full measure of opportunities and took them, experienced every human good and evil, and lived from first to last with a certain roundness of activity and thought, it was Goethe. He lived as a poet, an artist, a statesman, an administrator, and a man of science. He knew war and danger and travel. He was intimate with every grade of society, rich, poor, royal, and disreputable. He was on terms of friendship with most of the greatest men of his day, and in his maturity those who were afterwards to fill Europe with their fame turned their eyes to him as their greatest master. He suffered or enjoyed all the common fortunes of

mankind—marriage, fatherhood, the loss of friends and wife and children, the hatred of enemies, the tempest and decline of emotions. To women he was singularly attractive, and there was hardly a week of his life in which he was not in love. He was endowed with a personal greatness and an indomitable vitality. The illness of which he died at eighty-three was only his fourth, and into the chinks and corners of a life so full and active he had contrived to stuff some fifty volumes of his works, all of them significant, many of new influence upon thought and science, and a few of that high and unquestioned rank which is called immortal—works that have passed into the common heritage of mankind, which not to know argues a man uneducated.

Yet even in Goethe's case, when the end comes and we hear the old man asking his servant to open the other shutter, we are conscious of incompleteness. We know that, like Solomon, "he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of beast and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes; also he spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five." But what he accomplished seems trifling compared with the wonders due from such a mind. Here is the man who created Faust, Gretchen, and Mephisto, Werther, Mignon, Philine, and some lyrics that Heine declared to be the best ever sung by man. And yet how sketchy and uncertain most of his creations are! Those sixty years of tinkering over "Faust"—how obscure and confusing they have left the greater part of it in the end! In "Meister" there is no unity of intention, the treatment is frequently changed, anything that comes handy is thrown in, and the last part has

no more connection than a cart-load of shot bricks. Even in "Werther," the most artistic of his longer works, the character of the heroine changes in the middle, because, though the book was only a few weeks in writing, Goethe had meantime fallen in love with a different kind of girl. We need not speak of all the other works—of "Egmont," "Iphigenie," "Tasso," "Hermann and Dorothea," "The Elective Affinities," and the many more, in which there is no live fire of imaginative inspiration, nothing of the flame that mortality cannot quench. It seems as though the great critic of his age could never criticize himself—as though this man who wrote and thought so much about art was rather unusually incapable as an artist.

Many interests and faculties were fighting in that one soul, as for the possession of a fair country. There was the will of the man of action, the delight in mixing with mankind, in guiding their counsels, undertaking their service, and getting something accomplished for the obvious good of the world or the village. During his first years in Weimar we see him directing the mines at Ilmenau, relieving the destitute weavers of Apolda, converting the University of Jena from a proverb of barbarity into the true home of German thought, prescribing for the cattle-plague, drilling a troop of hussars, repairing roads, riding out night after night to save the wooden huts of the peasants from fire. To confront this spirit of human action, of politics, and philanthropy, stood the cold and eager spirit of natural science, always urging him forward to peer more and more deeply into the secret of nature, to clasp her breasts, to unveil her infinitely varied unity. Here was a pursuit that for many years might well seem to him worth all the rest of his

endeavours. We remember the 78th Venetian Epigram, and how he answers the common lamentation of his friends over the loss of the poet in him :—

“ ‘ Always at botany ? Always at optics ? What does it bring you ?

Touching some tender heart, is not that higher reward ? ’

Ah, yes, the tender hearts ! Any bungler is able to touch them.

My one prayer is to touch, Nature, the hem of thy robe ! ”

“ People talk a lot about my poems,” he used to say, “ but the thing I am proud of, the thing I shall be remembered by, is my treatise on colour.” Even for him, it was a strangely false estimate of his true power ; but it shows the devotion of his mind to the realities of external nature.

And between these great forces and attractions fluttered the shy poetic spirit, half angel and half bird, so frail and evanescent, so easily driven from the field where it was born to live. Poetry is a talent, as he said, like virtue—of no avail unless it is practised unseen like a dangerous secret. At first sight it may seem as if he would have done better to sacrifice all his other thronging interests and pursuits to the practice of just that one mysterious and incalculable power. We might have had more immortal poems then. He was distracted, torn asunder, and diffused by all that variety of knowledge and performance. It is exactly his much-boasted many-sidedness which gives the sense of incompleteness to his life. We do not feel it in Darwin or Beethoven or in the wreck of Heine. It seems as though the true completeness of life had, after all, little to do with wealth of experience or variety of achievement, but rather with the passionate intensity of the soul’s concentration. Is this, perhaps, what Paul Bourget meant when he spoke of Goethe as “ the sublime Philistine ” ?

And, yet, torn between knowledge, action, and art, as Goethe was, it is impossible to think of failure in connection with a life so sincere and wakeful, so regardless of tradition and other people's advice. We must remember the contempt into which the name of poet had then fallen and is always likely to fall. In all the Newgate Calendar of letters there is no chapter more dreary and depressing than German literature for a hundred years before Goethe's appearance. If, by his wide activity and unrestrained interest in the world, he closed that page down for ever, all Europe owes him something. The dangers of a poet's or writer's life are well known, and there are some who would willingly go without a few excellent poems in order to enjoy the consolation of Goethe's serene composure, his disregard of popularity, his frankness and sunny tolerance, contrasted with familiar literary moods—the ravenous vanity, the absorption in self, the diseased sensitiveness :—

“ As peevish, cross, and splenetic,
As dog distract or monkey sick.”

“ Thrust your hands deep into the fulness of life,” he used to say ; and by his strong grip upon reality he did more than any writer of last century to restore a dignity and influence to the poet and man of letters. Even when his work is at its dulllest, most diffuse, and ill-constructed, there is generally about it that note of sincerity which is one of the rarest qualities that compose genius, and it is a sincerity derived from contact with hard reality on many sides. The same sincere reality gives to his work, when it is at its very best a “ severe delight ” spoken of by Wordsworth.

It is common to compare Goethe's life with the Faust to whose dubious and long-drawn story he

kept returning for so many years, and the significance of the last scene cannot be mistaken. In search of the one moment to which he might cry, "O stay! thou art so fair," Faust has been led through paths of every pleasure, both gross and beautiful; he has entered the great world and stood at the Emperor's side; he has followed the perfect beauty of Helena through classic lands; he has witnessed revolutions, wars, and the shock of armies. In extreme old age, and blinded by care, he sets to cultivating a patch of sand and wave. He calls for his labourers, and at the sound of their spades and picks his heart is full of joy. He pictures to himself the happy race that shall dwell upon these fields and daily conquer freedom. That would be a moment to which he could cry, "O stay! thou art so fair." In anticipation, he already enjoys the highest point of life, and suddenly he falls back dead, not among labourers, as he had supposed, but among the Lemurs, who were digging his grave. They cram him into the trench, and Mephisto clutches him fast. But descending spirits bear him away, regardless of contracts with the Evil One. "Delivered from evil is the noble spirit," so they sing: "Who without ceasing onward strives, him we have power to redeem." And if we wanted a summary of the whole of Goethe's life, we could not find a better.

XLIV

THE LEGEND OF FAUST

(Enacted at His Majesty's Theatre, London, Sept. 1908)

To see Mr Tree as the Devil might satisfy a curiosity in playgoers, but when the curtain at His Majesty's rose, there was nothing new in the theme of Mr Stephen Phillips and Mr Comyns Carr. It was not a virgin soil that they were cultivating. Some years ago a diligent German professor, named Karl Engel, totted up the books, plays, and pamphlets in which the story of Faust had been told. He collected two thousand seven hundred and thirteen titles before he died, and even then he left his task unfinished—it was called "Die Zusammenstellung der Faust Schriften." For the poor Professor never lived to see Nellie Farren in "Little Doctor Faust," or Irving as Mephisto, either of which would have given him a happy end. And so, as a German professor can be trusted in arithmetic, we know for certain that the present version was at least the two thousand seven hundred and sixteenth that has been attempted. It is rather depressing that of all that number only two have counted, except in the German's simple addition. And even after His Majesty's, we cannot say three.

Evidently, there is something attractive in the idea of a learned man who sells his soul to the Devil. To unlearned people, who give their souls for nothing, it seems a pleasing vengeance upon superiority. That the legend originated with the unlearned is shown by

the kind of pleasures which Faust purchased in exchange for eternal torment. His joys have always largely consisted in the beery jests that Germans think merry and call mad. In his first authentic biography, published a year before the Armada attempted our holy shores, and entitled "A Life of Doctor Faust, Compiled from his own Manuscripts, for the Instruction, awful Example, and earnest Warning of all presumptuous, over-curious, and impious Folk"—in that first biography we find tricks upon the Pope's dinner and apple-pie beds for the Sultan's wives ranking high among the pleasures for which the man of learning consigned his immortal soul to perdition. It is significant, too, that the Devil as part of his price taught him the German miracle of making wine without grapes, the tradition of which lingers in Hamburg to this day, though now the ultimate penalty is paid by those who drink.

It is true that in that early story Faust visited the stars and called up Helen from the classic shades, and even took a glimpse at hell, as though seeking a foretaste of things to come. But his chief delight was in the Till Owlglass merriment of beer barrels, and it is queer to see how even Marlowe, who had read the tale and put it to such magnificent use, was caught by the German infection in the unremembered parts of his play. It is almost as queer that this side of the old legend should have suggested to Goethe the scene in Auerbach's cellar. Faust came from communing with eternity and with the spirit who labours at the buzzing loom of time. How, then, could a clever Devil suppose that for him a German student's Kneipe would be a fair exchange for damnation? A cultured don may not as a rule commune with the Earth Spirit or spend much thought on eternal truths,

but even he would not dream of giving his soul to be present at a fresher's wine. He would be more likely to give his soul to stop away.

At the back of all this legend one discerns the figure of some dim scholar, some prophet of approaching change, dwelling alone with knowledge among the roofs and spires of an old German town. A Churchman's letter, written while Henry VIII. was still innocent of matrimony, tells of such a man whose name was Faust, and ascribes to him the dangerous powers of working miracles and knowing Plato and Aristotle by heart. In the year when a wife survived Henry VIII., Faust is mentioned again, but as one already dead—strangled by the Devil in accordance with his bond. In that mention we meet the dog for the first time—the black dog, which has always played such a part in the Faust legend and was sure to trot into His Majesty's by kind permission of the Hippodrome. Wagner first appeared in another "Life of Doctor Faust," published nearly fifty years later, in the very year that Marlowe's play was acted. And that is all we know for certain of the dim scholar who lived alone in an unknown German town. He passionately sought wisdom in the New Learning of the Greeks. He experimented in chemistry, for he wrought miracles, and to the common mind all the greatest miracles are chemical. He was fond of animals, for he kept a dog. He endured boredom, for he kept Wagner. And he probably had a German woman as housekeeper, for gossip said he associated with Helen, the ideal of feminine beauty.

How tragic a fate has befallen that humble and obscure man of learning! We need not suppose him a man of unearthly virtue—not so unimpeachable as the hero of a Chinese novel, who was so very good

that in his thirtieth year he was allowed to converse with the Emperor. But, still, we recognise in him a patient and devoted lover of wisdom, tinged, perhaps, with the scholar's melancholy at the hopelessness of knowing all that life offers for knowledge, but mild and tolerant by nature. One of his few authentic sayings maintains that the Devil was not so black as he was painted, and Hell not so hot as was generally supposed. "Ah!" whispered the townspeople, "he may get on very well with the Devil in his garret up there, or riding to his wicked dances with women we know of on broomstick and cloak, but as to the comparative coolness of Hell, he will find out his mistake when his twenty-four years of revelry are up!"

The twenty-four years have been up for nearly four centuries now, and still the damnation of Faust continues. After Marlowe's play, nothing could save him. His lamentable story went back again to the theatres of German Courts. At German fairs it became the most popular of Punch-and-Judy shows, with Faust as Punch, Helen as Judy, the black dog as Toby, and Mephisto as the executioner. A squeaking voice from underneath the show always brought down the curtain with the words: "Faust, thou art being judged! . . . Faust, Faust, thou art damned, damned, damned!" And so the curtain rose again on the damnation of Faust at His Majesty's. Really, it is a tragic fate for any scholar, even a bad one.

But the main interest does not lie in the poor old scholar so repeatedly sent to perdition, but in the devil who sends him there again. It is seldom that a spiritual conception has changed so rapidly as the Devil did between the days of Luther and of Goethe. The devil who haunted Faust in his real German attic was rather a tricky thing, amid all his obvious terrors

—a little childlike, almost good-humoured. When Luther turned on him with the appeal, "If grace cannot save me, you must pray for me yourself," we feel he would relish the humour of the situation. Burns, writing at the same time as Goethe, was clinging fondly to the old conception when he cried :—

"Hear me, auld Hangie, for a wee,
And let poor damnèd bodies be ;
I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie
E'en to a Deil,
To skelp an' scaud poor dogs like me,
An' hear us squeal."

There is something homely and human, a touch of the household pet, about the creature. But in good society he would be as much out of place as a bumpkin given to practical jokes or the conjuror from a fair. To be sure, Goethe's Mephisto, in his conversation with the Lord, for one moment half pities the wretched brood of man, and has hardly the heart to plague them further, but we have in him no more of a rollicking and lubber spirit than in Milton's Satan. He is, as Goethe himself said in old age, "the living result of a vast observation of the world." Or, as Carlyle said of him, he is the devil, not of superstition, but of knowledge. He has so changed that when he visits the old witch she does not know him again. "Culture," he sighs, "has licked the devil smooth. Men have banished the northern phantom, but haven't got much by the exchange ; they have lost the Wicked One, but kept the wicked." So now he is the man about town ; a delightful conversationalist, never declaiming or volunteering information, but profound in the knowledge of iniquity—"a lynx of hell," as the witches call him, with a sleuth-hound's nose for

evil. In any decent circles he would pass very well as the commonplace, negative kind of man raised to a higher power. It is only Gretchen that feels at sight of him the instinctive horror that a dog feels at a snake, though he has never seen one before.

But I need not here analyse the most significant personality of modern literature, or dwell upon those scenes of unsurpassed subtlety and pathos in which the spirit of evil is revealed at work, until, at the common spectacle of a young girl's ruin, we are ready to cry with Faust as he enters her prison: "*Der Menschheit ganzer Jammer fasst mich an,*" and the long misery of all mankind lays hold upon us. It is nearly a century and a half since the creation of Mephistopheles was begun. That is not long for the growth of a spiritual idea, but the change from the earliest of Faust's devils up to Goethe's took only some fifty years longer, and I wonder what fresh conception of the Evil One may now be developed in succession to Mr Tree's.

XLV

WITH TOLSTOY

Moscow stood on the edge of revolution, and the forces of government and freedom confronted each other in the tremulous pause that comes before a battle, when I left the frightened city and journeyed some hundred miles out into the open land to visit the prophet of peace and goodwill—to hear the voice of another crying in the wilderness.

It was a December morning in 1905, and all Central Russia lay under its deep covering of snow, marked with indigo lines of forests, and touched with edges of crimson by the low sun. Tolstoy's village stood silent at the open gates, huddled together in the cold. The trees before his large white house of "Bright Plains," or "Sunny Fields," were heavy with cushions of snow. He himself had just come in from a walk round his grounds, as though he were no more than an English squire, with not a thought beyond his fences and his pheasants—he, the most shattering of all living thinkers.

There he stood, in the familiar grey shirt of a Russian peasant, without coat or collar, leather top-boots, and a leather belt round his waist. He was then seventy-seven, and his spirit seemed to have withdrawn more deeply into the shrunk and wrinkled form. But he stood slim and erect, and under the shaggy and overhanging brows his grey-green eyes (rather small for so imaginative a nature) still looked

out with the profound thought and fearless simplicity which have made him the greatest rebel in the world.

Looking at him, I seemed to realise in his form the course of his long life, as in a summarised biography. I saw the sensitive and difficult child ; the youth in society, headstrong, fashionable, and full of the lust of life ; the young officer with his Cossacks in the Caucasus, or commanding one of the batteries which so long held the French and English at bay before Sevastopol ; the patient writer, living unknown and unnoticed in the country for fifteen years at work upon the two imaginative works which I think the greatest of all novels ; and then the unsparing physician of our time, the man whose spiritual insight acts as a solvent on all the clotted grandeur, and dignity, and position, and authority of the established world, and melts them away ; the worshipped saint of the peasants, the teacher of Europe, the most destructive of Anarchists, the one Russian revolutionary whom the Tsar, with all his whips and gaols, and torture-chambers and rifles, does not dare to touch.

“ Is this the face that launched a thousand ships ? ” cried Dr Faustus to the vision of Helen ; and, looking at that rugged old man, I was filled with a similar wonder and awe. This was he who had told of war as no one else, and had tested every true and every false note alike in the arts and life of peace—the man who had created Anna, the largest-natured and most generous of women, and Kitty, the sweetest—had created Levin, almost the only endurable hero of fiction, and Ilyitch, who died as most men die, and the prostitute Maslova, who rose from the dead.

The creation of living souls like these is the miracle of literature, and as certain devils are not cast out

but by prayer and fasting, so these personalities are produced only by a peculiar intensity and devotion of spirit. They are the result of a life habitually moving upon a profound level of thought. Compare them with the characters of ordinary fiction, and you are instantly conscious of the immeasurable and impassable gulf between greatness and a good average. In recent literature the creation of this poignant and almost overwhelming reality has been mainly seen in Russia. Indeed, I do not know where to look for it elsewhere within modern times, unless it may sometimes be found in Thomas Hardy, or in the very best of Victor Hugo, when, for a moment, he forgets himself, and France, and glory. There is something in Russian life which compels the mind to dwell among the profounder regions that underlie the scenes of every day. Perhaps it is the Russian's compensation for a life of almost perpetual danger amid the melancholy of a flat and poverty-stricken land, tormented by its government.

From boyhood, Tolstoy has moved habitually upon this deeper plane of existence. So far as the secret of genius can be expressed, his secret is the vision of spiritual realities underlying common life. With intense insight, he has penetrated into the hidden places of the soul. To Wordsworth the meanest flower that blows could give thoughts that often lay too deep for tears. To Tolstoy, the meanest soul that lives can do the same.

His one occupation is with the human soul, his one care to explore the true causes of its happiness and misery, the possibilities of its grandeur, the blindness of its ordinary existence, the pitiful loneliness of its failures and extinction. It is this principle—the insistence upon the importance and capacity of the

separate human soul—which gives unity and consistency to all his works, so various in form ; brief pictures of life, prolonged works of imagination, dramas, sketches of autobiography, essays, and sermons. Nor can I in the least agree with those who carefully mark off one period of his writing from another and say that up to this point he was an artist, and then became only a prophet. From the first he has always been a prophet—a prophet of the soul—and the purport of his prophecy has always been the same. You may find it in the long perplexities of Petroff in “ War and Peace ” or in the quick lights and shadows of Anna Karenina’s heart, or in the mowing scene among the peasants, or in Levin’s last meditation, where he realises a truth “ which is a secret for him alone, of vital importance for him, and not to be put into words.”

A man possessed by a message which he has to deliver to the world will state it more directly, more hurriedly, perhaps, as he grows older and knows his time is short. In such books as “ My Confession,” “ What is to be Done ? ” “ The Kingdom of God is Within You,” and “ What is Art ? ” Tolstoy sought to deliver his message with such brevity and distinctness that no one could possibly overlook or mistake it. Then, when all the critics and literary men of Europe had just finished crying out against him for giving up to man what was meant for artistic circles, he suddenly reinforced the purpose of his doctrine by creating in “ Resurrection ” such personalities and scenes as surpassed, in tragic power and human insight, the work of all the novelists. That is the glory of the imaginative gift. Had Tolstoy written nothing but his essays, it is very likely that Europe would have known little more of him than it knows

of many other founders of Russian sects and schools. But when the passion of humanity and the zeal of prophets are united to the highest imaginative power, the world is compelled to listen, as it will have to listen, I suppose, to the Last Trumpet.

The value of the human soul, whether it be mortal, or immortal—its capacity for obscure sufferings, but for joy and righteousness as well—its utter loneliness upon the way, and yet its gleams of transfiguring delight in "love," or the sense of union and fellowship with other lonely and isolated souls—the supreme importance of everything that promotes this union, the supreme wickedness of all that prevents it, and the indifference of everything else in the world—these are the truths which have guided Tolstoy in all his work, or, rather, which he divined and finally discovered in the course of life itself. He has found them most simply and definitely stated in the undisputed sayings of Christ, stripped of the interpretations and excuses of compromising Churchmen who wished to stand well with comfort and authority. These truths, when once discovered, he has followed with a logic that poor old human nature feels to be remorseless. Once accept them as true, once admit the actual teaching of Christ without compromise or gloss, and step by step Tolstoy leads you along into regions where officials and people in easy circumstances feel very uncomfortable. There is no turning back. At every subterfuge of escape you find the cherubim of logic and truth standing with flaming swords, which turn every way. The old Adam of civilisation and the world is convicted of sin. He sees that he is naked, and becomes painfully conscious of his shame. He longs to get back to his easy-going Paradise of Church, and State, and progress. But the tormenting

fruit of knowledge fills his veins, and those flaming swords drive him helplessly further and further from what he had supposed to be his peace. His one chance is to deny what he knows to be true, and how can he do that? He generally does it, and his position, once only painful, now becomes ridiculous.

Taking the simplest words of Christ as literal truths—not because Christ said them, but because he had himself found them true in life—taking these as a test or loadstone for the way, Tolstoy sets out upon his voyage of criticism, and examines modern civilisation in every phase. With a remorseless logic which habit and custom naturally shiver at, he brings his test to bear upon law, Church, State, property, and art. Bit by bit, these accepted things are seen to fall to pieces. They are decomposed, and the result is very discomposing also to those who believe in them or live by them. For a second time, a great teacher of peace brings, not peace, but a sword, and it is in the soul of each man that the sword is planted, arousing a bitter and harassing strife between the smooth compromises of accepted conduct and the uneasy, turbulent, and savage rebels of truth.

As to civilisation, he writes :—

“ All these people who live by it—kings, emperors, presidents, princes, ministers, officials, officers, landowners, merchants, doctors, scientists, artists, teachers, priests, writers—all these say for certain that our civilisation is such a boon that the idea of its disappearance or even alteration cannot be admitted. But ask the enormous mass of the Slavonic, Chinese, Indian, or Russian agricultural people, nine-tenths of humanity, whether this precious civilisation is indeed a boon or not. Strange to say, nine-tenths of humanity will answer quite differently.” (“ The End of an Age.”)

Of the Church he writes :—

"Every Church, as a Church, has always been, and always must be, an institution, not only foreign, but absolutely hostile to the doctrine of Christ." ("The Kingdom of God is Within You.")

No one, not even Carlyle, has proclaimed more diligently the gospel of work—of "bread-labour," as he calls it. Yet, refusing to be enslaved even to his own doctrine, he writes:—

"Work is not a virtue, but a necessity—often only a moral anæsthetic."

In art, as in life, he looks only for the personal soul and the welfare of the common people:—

"Art is only the expression of the artist's nature. . . . Great works of art are only great because they are accessible and intelligible to everyone. . . . Art must produce that feeling of joy, of spiritual union with the author of it." ("What is Art?")

But when I saw him he was chiefly occupied, as was natural, with the turmoil of the revolution then seething around him in Russia. He was writing "The End of an Age"—his criticism and condemnation not only of the age of Empires, but of all States and Governments, constitutional as well as despotic. From this book I take a few sentences:—

"While belonging to a State a man cannot be free. And the greater the State the more violence is necessary, and the less is true freedom possible.

"The true object of the Russian revolution is emancipation from State coercion.

"The cause of all the calamities people suffer is obedience to power."

Certainly the author of such sentences may be called the greatest of rebels. But if it is thought

that I dwell too much on his destructive and critical side, I need quote but one sentence of positive teaching: "There is only one possible way of serving mankind—by becoming better yourself."

As I took my leave, I knew I was parting from one of those very few men who are worth listening to—men who have lived a courageous and genuine life, in close touch with realities and with the common lot of mankind—men who speak from life and not from books, or newspapers, or opinions, and who realise the underlying truths of life better than others can or dare. But I knew at the same time that he lay, like a still pool, outside the whirling current of his people's movement. Returning to Moscow, I found the whole city contending, on this side or that, for all that he condemned—for government, for the Church, for military honour, for property, for the suffrage, for the rule of a majority, for a Socialistic State. Within four days the officers began murdering in the name of the Tsar, barricades were piled across the streets in the name of the people. The air crashed and whined with bullets and shells, and the snow was reddened with the blood of men and women whose souls had been very important to themselves, and were strangely endowed with capacities for joy and sorrow, and even for a kind of goodness.

XLVI

THE LAST OF HIS PEERS

WHEN a man is deaf, hopelessly crippled, and over eighty, I suppose we must call him old, for the body is preparing its last insane triumph, when in its own dissolution it will involve the spirit. Old in the flesh, George Meredith cannot choose but be. Men of fifty-five could not remember the appearance of his first poems, and probably there are not half a dozen people now living who read "Richard Feverel" in its first year of life. It was the year of "The Tale of Two Cities." I think "Evan Harrington," the second of the novels, had the same date as "Great Expectations," and I have heard that Dickens was unworthily jealous of the young author when it began to appear in "Once a Week."

So that it was to our father's generation that Meredith belonged in his prime—the generation of the demi-gods, when the great names of Carlyle and Ruskin, Tennyson, and Browning, Dickens and Thackeray and George Eliot led English literature. Matthew Arnold was just beginning to be recognised, but Hardy and Swinburne were still unknown. It is true that he began to produce masterpieces before he was thirty, and for forty years his creative power was maintained. No Englishman now living has created anything to compare with his work in variety and scope; or, at most, there is but one younger author who can compare to him. And yet, in point of date,

it obviously all belongs to the generation that is gone or going. It is the product of another age, it has won its place, and already we seem to hear the lecturers who carve the epitaphs of literature summarising with equal care its pedigree, its qualities, and its price.

It is a peculiar thing, then, that there is a freshness about his books as of to-day, and all who meet their aged writer find in him a spirit as young as youth. No new Liberal Member, just learning his way to the House, follows the course of the world with brighter zeal. Isolated and almost motionless, he watches the movements of the day, the path of Europe's thought, the gradual fulfilment of notable careers with the mindful observation of a youthful editor inspired by conscience. Nothing appears to escape him, and his memory holds last week as clearly as the Austrian Campaign of 'sixty-six. Neither is there any trace of conscious melancholy in his aspect of the world; no lamentation over modern degeneracy, or regret for the brave days when at last even the British public recognised a great writer in the author of "The Egoist." As he once said of himself, he looks out upon life with young eyes, and one may perceive something of the same unconquerable spirit in the physical pride which disdains the crutches and ear-trumpets of deaf and crippled age.

The head is very noticeable—essentially Greek. It might have served as model for those statues of mature and powerful manhood which, in our museums, are now labelled "A Poet," or "An Orator." But if it is a poet's head, it is a Greek poet's. There is no trace of the indecision, effeminacy, and petulant unrestraint which "a poetic appearance" suggests to modern minds. It belongs to a type that could be

honoured even by manly people. It is the head of one, who, like Sophocles, could have commanded a fleet as easily as write a tragedy. When we see it, we do not wonder that the Athenians should have expected their great poet to do both as a matter of course. There are modern writers who wear a shut-up, indoor look. Their faces are like the windows of a sick chamber, and we dimly discern the invalid and delicately curtained soul within. But the very look of Meredith tells of the open sky, where the sun marches and the winds pipe, and the thunderclouds mass their battalions. He might have sailed with Drake; he would have made a fine leader of forlorn hopes, and a glorious hunter. Like the Carinthia of his story, he blows the horn of the wild old forest.

Perhaps it was to action rather than letters that his nature ran. I have only once seen him depart from the stately courtesy of his intercourse. He had been saying how much he envied me some distant journey I had made, or significant fighting at which I had been present, and I, to comfort him, had replied with the weary old saying about the really important events of history taking place in the mind. It is difficult to express exactly what one means to a deaf man, and he saw at once I did not really believe that bit of intellectual cant, which must have been concocted in a don's study as excuse for a lifetime's idleness. "That's the stuff they all tell me—they all tell me," he kept repeating, and glared angrily for a time.

His is the head of an orator, too—a Greek orator. like Pericles. The great mouth opens almost four square. It is an Attic mask. A spirit seems to be speaking, not with it, but through it, and on a broad scale of sound comes the voice full, unhesitating, and

distinct to the last letter. We feel that, as Mendelssohn said of Goethe, he could shout like a hundred warriors. There is no effort about the language; the great sentences are thrown out with the careless opulence of Nature. Metaphors, wit, or epigrams come of themselves, as water follows water from a spring. He thinks in pictures and symbols. A comely and mature lady appears to him at once as "a calm autumn day—and in the morning." In thinking of the conversation of Society he sees a flock of sheep jumping a ditch in turn; a burst of laughter makes a gap; there is a pause; then the rest, come hurrying over—"some of them falling short, their hind feet struggling to reach the edge." Speaking of England's persistent refusal to redress the ancient wrong of Ireland, he recalls a man who told him he rather liked having an open sore on his leg; it added an interest to life.

It is the same, when, as often happens, he talks "the adorable silliness of intellect." The pictures follow each other with such vivid reality that raillery can hardly be distinguished from earnest. I remember a story he told of an intellectual banking friend of his, whom he pictured withdrawing to a seaside retirement at the end of a dusty week and regaling himself in sumptuous simplicity upon an enormous crab and a bottle of the finest Burgundy. One saw it all—the house smiling with silver, the gleaming polish of rosewood, the elegant volumes round the walls, the gentle light, the cherry-coloured crab, the ruby in the mellow wine. It was like a Dutch interior, solid satisfaction ennobled by charm. For the sake of cultured hedonism, for the elevation of city life, one longed that it might be true, but it was all a sudden vision of the brain.

To me there was something equally vivid in his proposal for making his poems better known by hiring a meeting-room in Aldeburgh and reading his Odes to the fishermen and other longshore people. One can see that scattered and silent audience, clinging to the chairs like shipwrecked mariners upon the vasty deep, while from the wooden platform beside the harmonium the most splendid of our living writers thunders over their heads some passage like the familiar lines :—

“ Cannon his name,
Cannon his voice, he came.
Who heard of him heard shaken hills,
An earth at quake, to quiet stamped ;
Who looked on him beheld the will of wills,
The driver of wild flocks where lions ramped.”

One can see the slow puffing of the pipes, the respectful spitting on the floor. One can hear the comments as the jerseyed figures roll away through the gate. “ He dew speak it out, and no mistake he dew. They’re right as say he has got a headpiece on him, they are. That there about Tom Cannon comin’ up the straight—that’s the bit for my money ! ”

But I think his mind moves more easily and with a finer sense for admiration and for irony upon a higher social level. He has created a few notable figures of the poor and labouring classes—the man in “ Diana ” who “ could eat hog a solid hower ” ; old Master Gammon in “ Rhoda Fleming,” with his dumplings and cheering immutability ; and, like everyone else, I should add Mrs Berry, too,—but for one impossible scene between her and Lucy. Yet he belongs by right to another region—the region of the Comic Spirit, which, as he says in “ The Egoist,”

deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilised men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes to make the correctness of the representation convincing. It is only in this region that the problems of his greatest books could arise—the temptation of Feverel, or the impassioned perplexities of Diana and Emilia Belloni. It is only here that one could find Sir Willoughby Patterne, and rare as happy would be the man of this class who could read that analysis of Egoism without wincing. It was only here that Meredith could fulfil his great office of liberator, as we see it fulfilled especially in “One of Our Conquerors,” “Lord Ormont,” and “The Amazing Marriage.” It is a liberation by thought and courage and passion, and it liberates from the falsity and half-heartedness which Meredith identifies with sentimentalism. It also liberates from the power of the Being which Meredith describes as “the terrible aggregate social woman, of man’s creation, hated by him, dreaded, scorned, satirized, and nevertheless upheld, esteemed, applauded. . . . She exhibits virtue, with face of waxen angel, with paw of desert beast, and blood of victims on it.” It is only in the region of the Comic Spirit that this honourable monster can be found and fought.

In many of his books the scenes of this human comedy are played before a background of the great world’s history—the gallant rebellion of Italy, the upward struggles of the English workmen, the alliance of Bismarck with Lassalle. So in life, the movements of the time, especially in European lands, have always been accurately present to him, and are present still. What he would think of the Russian revolution, which will be the main European interest of the

present generation, might be judged from the revolutionary novel of "Vittoria," or even from brief sentences in it, such as : " We Italians of this period are children of thunder, and live the life of a flash. The worms may creep on, the men must die." As he said to me once when discussing the tyrannicide of people like Plehve : " At such times a Lower Court of Justice arises, and to that we make appeal."

But in speaking of any foreign nation he follows his own rule of insisting always upon the best that they have given to the world, and not upon the worst. Even of Germans he speaks with the respect due to intellectual zeal and the thoroughness of knowledge. He was pleased with a German wine-merchant who once sent him specimen bottles of all the great wines mentioned in the books, with the appropriate quotation marked on each. " No English wine-merchant could have done such a thing—least of all for a German author," he said. But it is to France that he has always been most attracted by all the inborn sympathies of spirit. And he has lately extended a share of the same admiration to the Japanese, for their chivalrous devotion to a code of honour and their exact mastery of detail.

I think it is this chivalrous devotion to a high ideal of honour—this " Bushido "—that he chiefly misses among modern Englishmen. Commercial standards have taken its place, and, as he says in " One of Our Conquerors " :—

" These Britons wear
The driven and perplexed look of men,
Begotten hastily 'twixt business hours."

He is one of the few among us who find rather a dubious blessing in that eternal " silver streak "

which enables us to do our killing and dying in war by hiring some thousands of the poor instead of undertaking the business ourselves. If we insist on doing our acts of bravery by proxy, it is hard indeed to maintain the quality of manliness, which he regards as the first essential of a grand nation. So it is that his conversation, like his books, abounds with little strokes of satire: our country is the female annuitant of Europe; London, the Daniel Lambert of cities.

But, in speaking of a nature so full of mental adventure, I will not end upon a note of satire. I would rather think only upon the vital and sunny temper of a man, who, after a long career of obscurity and renown, can still look out upon the world with knowledge and hope undiminished. His work has always moved upon great lines, and to the last he retains the sense of the grandeur and worth of life. "Nature," he said to me once, "goes upon her way, unfolding, improving, always pushing us higher, and I do not believe that this great process continues without some spiritual purpose, some spiritual force that drives it on."

And as to death, which, in spite of all his vitality, cannot be much further off from him than it is from the rest of us, he said on the same occasion: "Fearlessness of death is essential for manliness. Doctors and parsons do a lot of harm by increasing the fear of death. I was a very timid and sensitive boy, but at eighteen I determined not to be afraid again. Every night when I go to bed I know I may not wake up. That is nothing to me. I hope I shall die with a good laugh, like the old French woman. The curé came wailing to her about her salvation, and she told him her best improper story and died."

When I look at the long row of his books, so full of passion and of thought, and consider that their writer is still among us, still intent upon human affairs, it is such brave and hopeful words as these that I like to remember.

XLVII

THE SON OF EARTH

IN one of Mr Hardy's own illustrations to his "Wessex Poems," we see a Roman high road crossing a steep ridge of down, which rapidly falls into low-lying fields, and beyond them stretches the thin horizon of the sea, just broken by the cliffs of Portland. In the middle of the road, looking towards the sea, stands a lonely sentry, dressed in the uniform of Napoleon's time, and some miles away in front of him you can make out the little Georgian town of Weymouth.

The scene is very characteristic of the great author's work—the Roman road, the wide view, the distant sea, the little town, and the lonely figure standing between earth and sky. The Romans drove that road across the ridge of down already marked by the graves of an earlier savage race, and to the right of where that little sentry stands they built their camp among vast earthworks of warriors who have not left a name. It was this very point in the road that the mixed levies had reached when the news of Buonaparte's landing was contradicted, as is told in "The Trumpet Major." And from that high ridge you may now look round upon a wide and beautiful country which one man's brain has inspired with a life more genuine than its own.

Extended among the fields, or folded in woods and little valleys, there they all lie, the scenes of those

delicate and human lives—the town of Casterbridge, the villages of Weatherbury, Melstock, and Wellbridge, and behind them, like the edge of a dark and tossing sea, rise the sandhills and fir woods of Egdon Heath. Or, if we look towards the sun, at our feet is the genteel watering-place of Budmouth, and tied to it by the narrow Chesil Beach stands the old and quarried Isle of Slingers. It hardly matters whether we call these places Dorchester, Puddletown, Stinsford, Weymouth, and Portland, or by the author's names. One thing only concerns us : they all breathe the very soul of Bathsheba, and Eustacia, and Tess ; of Jude, and John Loveday, and Swithin ; and of the Well-beloved's lover, who never could grow old.

The mere identification of places does not much matter. The books would have exactly the same value if there were no such places at all. But of no other part of England could Mr Hardy have written as he has written of Wessex. I believe he thinks the general type of the English people, especially of the girls, is becoming more and more like his characters. I think so, too, and am heartily glad of it. That class which he most describes—an independent, lower-middle class, not fully educated, not quite exact in its grammar, but brought into touch with the realities of working life on the one side and with intellectual things on the other—that class in England is certainly gaining in humanity, in refinement, and in the subtleties of spirit and passion. But in Wessex people there is a further touch of something which you will not find, say, in Nottingham, or Northamptonshire. It is a sensitive and poetic quality, which the curious may trace to the absence of mines and factories, or to the larger survival here of the British spirit, protected by heaths and forests from the

invasions of stolid Germanity all those centuries ago. I only know that among those West-country people Thomas Hardy himself was born and grew up, that a tablet in Dorchester Church celebrates the beneficence of a Thomas Hardy of Shakespeare's time, and that on a down west of Portland stands a monument to the Hardy of Nelson's "Victory."

He is no changeling, as most of us are, but has sucked the breasts of the earth that bore him, and the spirit of that beautiful mother, whom so few of us have time to know, has passed into him. In all his work there is something of the grave simplicity of places where man has lived long in close relationship to the ground and the seasons. Most of his characters have grown to be what they are by slow and gradual changes, like woods or the surface of downs. They are deep-rooted in far-off traditions, and behind them all we feel the underlying past. Their interests and difficulties lie in the ancient lot of mankind, as it was in the beginning and is now. They have the profound speech and half unconscious humour of men not too harassed to observe the years—men to whom the world has not been narrowed by violent journeys and removals. In their drama of life, they make little more fuss than nature over birth and death and the varied fortunes between. This is no place for the "Comic Spirit" of cultured drawing-rooms, but humour and pathos are here at home—humour too near a neighbour to sorrow.

Into this quiet atmosphere of ancient life, Mr Hardy loves to introduce a spirit touched from its birth by something alien, something that reaches out into a world of different experience, whether for delight or intellectual need. Deep in such spirits some trace of precious but perilous substance lies, like a thin

vein of gold which is not used for its own sake and spoils the building-stone for use. In his four greatest tragedies—in "Tess," "Jude," "Far from the Madding Crowd," and "The Return of the Native"—we find it so. It is so in "A Pair of Blue Eyes," "The Hand of Ethelberta," and, very noticeably, in "Two on a Tower." If his genius had been a few degrees less powerful and his success in literature less assured, we might have found the same half-frustrated nature in Mr Hardy himself. In the very look of him one seems to detect the shy animal of heaths and woods—the offspring of earth, with ear always close to the ground. But into that primitive being the tormenting spark of intellect has entered. With pity and irony the rather sad eyes look out upon the brotherhood of mankind, so near the earth and so desirous of heaven, and all the face displays a curious sensitiveness—the same intense susceptibility to the piteousness of life that throws the shadow of the gallows across so many of his books, and prompted his protest against the use of horses upon the battlefield during the Boer War. It was the same sensitiveness that drove him to the description of the pig-killing in "Jude," and feeds his indignation at any sport involving pain and death. Take away the mysterious gift of genius, and we can see this sensitiveness and longing for intellectual things rendering a man only peculiar and unhappy in English country life, while they might bring him very little further along the higher road. We should find a character well suited for one of Mr Hardy's own ironic and pitying tales.

Pity and irony—they are among the most prominent Spirits that watch the dramatic epic or "panoramic show" of the vast Napoleonic struggle displayed in "The Dynasts." Condensation has

a great attraction for him, as for all good writers. I believe this is at the root of his persistent practice of verse. A lyric is a short and finished thing ; into three pages of verse it seems possible to cram the hundred thousand words of a novel. But for the necessities of sale and livelihood, Mr Hardy would have written nothing but verse. That hunger compelled him to write prose must seem to us one of the sweet uses of adversity. But how tempting is brevity ! Here, in three short volumes, we are given the etherealised spirit of whole libraries, and, as through the small end of a telescope, we behold once more the hosts of conquerors, the doom of kings, and the excited populations of European empires. The queer little figures run about ; they love and hate, they laugh and cry, and make a fine to-do. Here creeps the white Austrian army with "a movement as of molluscs on a leaf." There Napoleon shakes his little fist, and Pitt whispers his last great speech at the crisis of destiny. There goes Nelson with his ships, the passionate love in his heart and the penny cannon at the bow. There are the tiny villagers scrambling up their ant-hills to see a real match struck upon the tinder. They speak in ghosts of words. All is so tiny and dim that the squeaks of villagers and emperors hardly differ in their value, and when they have said their little say, the clouds of time pass over them all alike. They vanish as changeful manifestations of the controlling Immanent Will, which may sometimes almost be discerned "as a brain-like network of currents and ejections, twitching, interpenetrating, entangling, and thrusting hither and thither the human forms."

To a writer like Swift such a conception of the foremost nations of the world squirming together

like maggots in a cheese while the Immanent Will grinds along its way, probably unconscious, probably purposeless—such a conception would have been a theme for mockery and scorn. But in Mr Hardy there is never a touch of either. Irony is there, but it is the Spirit of the Pities that is chiefly felt. There may be no solution to the ultimate problems of human life. Man may be moving about upon this dying dust-speck in the universe without principle and without purpose. Let it be so then. Let us refuse to be put off by the imaginations of any fool's paradise. But, at all events, within the limits of the life of men and women as we know it for certain, there is room enough for joy, and plenty of room for pity. That in the midst of our daily struggle from birth to death mankind should ever have conceived such things as laughter or beauty or goodness appears to me a far more marvellous thing than the finest supernatural miracle ever invented in all the mythologies.

It is for this love of a mankind intermingled with the earth and nature that we compare Hardy with Wordsworth. In spite of their country themes and country life—though, in fact, Mr Hardy has probably spent nearly half his years in London—neither of them has any connection with idyllic art; their men and women have nothing in common with nymphs and swains. But both love the mankind that lies as close to the heart of earth as the grass and trees, and among men of low estate it is for the aristocracy of passion that both are always seeking—"the aristocracy of passion," to use Walter Pater's fine phrase for the true patent of nobility.

That is what one thinks of when at times among the brilliant lights and fresh-flowering dresses of a summer afternoon one sees a shy and delicate figure

passing down the Strand to hear some favourite old English service at St Paul's; or when he moves among the shops and marketings of Dorchester, respected by all as a Justice of the Peace and owner of a house and garden—honoured by some even in his own country for the fame which is his right, because since Wordsworth died, no one has heard the still, sad music of humanity with so fine an ear, and no English writer has ever expressed it in forms so poignant and dramatic.

XLVIII

THE DIAL IN PARADISE

IN spite of all its waters, Hammersmith does not sound much of a place for William Morris. But, apart from Hammersmith, one might almost think a Providence had arranged the most suitable scenes for him to live in, and had purposely set him there. The skirts of Epping Forest, long before they were cut to the municipal pattern, hung round his boyhood an interwoven tapestry of greens and purples. Close to his school at Marlborough stood another forest, the most beautiful now left in England, and the open downs under the sunset were scattered with vast grey stones and other vestiges of departed men. Oxford followed, still a mediæval city when he was up, breathing with ancient life, untainted as yet by the red-brick suburbs of marriage and the pretty parodies of his later self. Then came the decorated Kentish house, and London, which also has a history, and was once small and white and clean. But the most benign provision of his destiny came last.

Where the Cotswolds shut out the wildness of the Severn, the early Thames runs through a broad and little-known valley, in which seven centuries have hardly altered the shape of the meadows. It is a deep and fertile country, fragrant as a cow's breath—a land of deep and quiet waters moving between banks of agrimony, loosestrife, and scented flags. Willows stand along the watercourses too, but the country's

tree is the heavy elm, clustered about the old farm-houses, or in single file along the hedges round the corn. Grey watermills, with dark bridges and tunnels, span the streams, and beside the main river ancient villages stand around spires and churches designed by long-forgotten village builders. Cricklade, Kemsford, Lechlade,—names full of quiet ancestry—bring us to Kelmscott and the many-gabled house. A quiet and abundant land, sheltered from wildness, plentiful in trees and water, and deeply rooted in a happy past—that was the scene which, of all others, one would have chosen as symbolic of Morris and his genius. It was more fitting even than the streams and sweet fertility of Touraine, in which one has sometimes imagined him placed. For, exuberant though Morris was, his was not the exuberance of Rabelais or of Balzac, who dominate Touraine. In spite of all his Celtism, Scandinavianism, and the rest—or rather just because of those deep strains in our blood—Morris remained essentially English, and we imagine him best among the English associations of that old, but gentle, meadowland.

He was, as Mr William Yeats has said in his essay on "The Happiest of the Poets"—he was the poet of abundance rather than intensity. In all the beautiful work of his mature life, he never again approached the intensity of his youthful volume, "The Defence of Guenevere"—such intensity as is shown in the ballad beginning :—

" Had she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss ?
Yea had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods ? "

Or, again, the intensity of the invocation, faulty in rhyme, but still the finest lyric he ever wrote—the invocation in the same early volume, beginning :—

“ Pray but one prayer for me ’twixt thy closed lips ;
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.”

In his favourite scenes there is no torture, of unendurable passion, no thought or emotion that would leap beyond the flaming ramparts of the world ; but we see rather some picture full of lovely colours and the ease of satisfied desire in mind and body. As Mr Yeats has said :—

“ Now it is a picture of some great room full of merriment, now of the wine-press, now of the golden threshing-floor, now of an old mill among apple-trees, now of cool water after heat of the sun, now of some well-sheltered, well-tilled place among woods or mountains, where men and women live happily, knowing of nothing that is too far off or too great for the affections.”

Outside that first volume, there is so little intensity in his work that hardly a single line can be quoted. Even in the first volume the scenes he loved to dwell upon were like that picture of brooding peace at the beginning of “ Golden Wings ” :—

“ Midways of a wallèd garden,
In the happy poplar land,
Did an ancient castle stand,
With an old knight for a warden.

Many scarlet bricks there were
In its walls, and old grey stone ;
Over which red apples shone
At the right time of the year.”

In the touch of affected simplicity in the last line, as in the calm beauty of the whole description, running on

for many stanzas, we see exactly what Morris was to become, and the kind of influence he was to have. We see the germ of all the pretty crimes committed in his name—the over-decoration, the expensive simplicity, the self-conscious picturesqueness, the deadly imitation that we still behold in the suburbs of culture. But we also see the ideal of happiness that was to remain with him to the end—a beautiful ideal, full of that “passion of the past” which, indeed, inspired it. He had before him always a land of streams and meadows, marked by buildings scarlet and grey, set in walled gardens—a land of “whispering trees in homely places, where the children play.” He never wavered far from that ideal, and it is significant that, when in “News from Nowhere,” he struggled to describe the Utopia of his so-called Socialism, he tired of economics long before the end, and wandered off into a charming account of the Upper Thames and Kelm-scott, as they would be when all men and women were the kind of people he liked, and could employ their time in his own charming manner.

That was where his first trouble came in. He was, in his very essence, a happy man, and he would so much have liked all men and women to be as happy as himself, but they evidently were not. In nearly all the arts he was a master craftsman, preserving the sanity that the work of the hand always ensures, and composing his mental works with much the same ease of mechanism as his tapestries. Joy in labour was for him the first necessity of life, and as he was always an artist and always rich, it came to himself quite naturally. But to others it did not come, and, do what he would, he could not remain blind and deaf to the immense misery of the present manufacturing world. That was the basis of all his later Socialism—

the knowledge that the enormous majority of civilised mankind is occupied upon industry without art and without pleasure. In later life the pain of this knowledge possessed him, but, as Mr Alfred Noyes rightly observes in his book on "William Morris" the origin of this sympathetic unhappiness may be seen much earlier. Speaking of the "Life and Death of Jason," Mr Noyes says :—

"It contains perhaps the first indication in his poetry that his mind was turning to the social problems with which he was soon to busy himself, and it shows from what direction he was approaching them. It is his first cry against 'the smoky net of unrejoicing labour.'"

He beheld modern England "meshed within the smoky net of unrejoicing labour," and the horror of the contrast between that sight and the bright vision he had formed of a Chaucerian England drove him, rather reluctantly, into his long and heroic efforts for social revolution. There was a time when Social Democrats used to claim William Morris as "a robust disciple of Karl Marx," but there was no scientific theorising and no pedantry in Morris's Socialism. I used very often to hear him in the earliest days of the movement, when he was speaking in the smudgy halls of Clerkenwell and similar districts for the "Democratic Federation," as it was then called, before the Socialist League was founded, or the "Commonweal" thought of. And it was always the voice of a sympathetic artist, keenly alive to the beauty and pleasure of the world, violently scornful of the rich who lived incapable as swine of the beauty and pleasure he knew so well, and violently sorrowful at the misery of the working people, into whose lives such beauty and pleasure could never come. Joy was

necessary for him, but the sense of community in joy was equally necessary. Of the theories and statistics and abstractions of dogmatic Socialism there was hardly a word, or, if Morris mentioned them at all, he sank at once to the pathetic level of a child repeating the dates of kings since "William the Conqueror, 1066."

The degradation and joylessness of the working people haunted him; they drove him to personal sacrifices in scenes that he abhorred; they forced him to gospels of equality when all his nature as artist cried aloud for variety of life. But, perhaps more than by the misery of the world, he was haunted by the common death. Death was the shadow on the dial standing in the midst of the fair garden into which his desire transformed existence. There stood the ancient house of Life, lovely with mellowed walls and mysterious hangings; beyond the sunlit garden a living stream of white and purple water turned a mill-wheel half hidden under grey arches; beyond the stream one heard the hum of joyful labour and the pleasant chaffering of the cheapingstead, while up and down the garden and the street comely women moved, fit for motherhood and unquestioning desire. But always upon the dial's face that shadow crept noiselessly, and houses fell and women faded and artists died. The fairer the world, the more poignant was the regret, and ever in the midst of the garden, as to the Roman poet, a voice kept crying, "Thou shalt go! Thou shalt go! Nor will any of the trees but the deathly cypress follow their shortlived lord." All through the earthly paradise of Morris's wholesome and exquisite nature we hear that haunting voice. In his sweetest lyrics, when for the moment he almost rises to passion, the voice is there:—

“ In the white-flowered hawthorn-brake,
Love, be merry for my sake ;
Twine the blossoms in my hair,
Kiss me where I am most fair—
Kiss me love ! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death ? ”

It is the old cry of that other Roman poet in his youth :
“ Suns may set and can arise again ; but when once
our brief day has set, we two shall sleep together in
unbroken night. Kiss me a thousand times and then
a hundred, and then another thousand times, and then
a second hundred.” So the shadow on the dial still
moved on, haunting the beautiful world that the soul
of Morris had created, and Mr Noyes gives us a char-
acteristic saying when he observes that the only
philosophic utterance Morris ever made about the
matter was that perhaps change and death were
necessary, or there would be no good stories.

XLIX

A DISTANT DRUM

To men whose breath of life lay in the coffee-house, the boudoir, and the little senate of the wits, there was irresistible attraction in sylvan solitudes and resounding vales. "Too happy swains, did you but know your joys!" they cried with envy as they went ruffling to a rout. Would it had been theirs to tend the flocks with Strephon when dawn was blushing, or Philomela roused the twilight groves! With what song they might have rivalled Daphnis in the wager for a dancing lamb; with what grace languished for the charms of Chloe! Not such their lot. For them Belinda was the nearest thing to nymph, and it had seemed uncouth to stake a lamb at Charing Cross. But in their verse they still turned with nature's yearning to pendant acclivities and woodbine bowers. They could still celebrate a country life, though envious fortune debarred them from the felicity of Thyrsis. "Thy forests, Windsor!" sang the most urbane among them—

"Thy forests, Windsor! and thy green retreats,
At once the Monarch's and the Muse's seats,
Invite my lays. Be present, sylvan maids!
Unlock your springs, and open all your shades.
Granville commands."

And at such behest, the Muse who sat on the same seats with the Monarch, helped a poet of the town through four hundred lines of Pastoral on end.

That was long ago, but the same sad desire for what is not still haunts our cities, and the suburban resident returning home pictures himself in wilder scenes than Tooting Bec. For there lurks an infinite spirit in man, and, as we have been told, his unhappiness comes of his greatness. True it is not always fresh woods and pastures for which he pines, and his longing may take more fantastic forms than perjured Doris and coy Sylvia's fleecy care. We have but to recall the peculiar sentiment of ten years back, or fifteen years at most, when, in a period of profound peace, the middle-aged citizen's fancy lightly turned to thoughts of war. How far removed from the daily round his natural sphere of action seemed ! How little his back garden resembled the battle that, like Job's warhorse, he smelt afar off ! When his pleasing wife greeted him in the evening, his heart was burning, like the Queen of Scots, to be a man and know what thing it was to lie all night upon the heather with a claymore at his side. As he sharpened the steel for dinner, he sang to himself the " Song of the Sword." He was within an ace of joining the Volunteers.

" The Song of the Sword ! "—yes, it was Henley who first uttered that natural yearning of the peaceful clerk :—

" As he knew me and named me
The War-Thing, the Comrade,
Father of honour
And giver of kingship,
The fame-smith, the song-master,
Bringer of women
On fire at his hands
For the pride of fulfilment,
Priest (saith the Lord)
Of his marriage with victory."

It jogs the liver like a Wagner libretto. Mr Kipling, to whom the song was dedicated, could hardly have written worse. It has all the worst of Mr Kipling's qualities—the brag mistaken for courage, the lust mistaken for manliness, the fumbling obscurity, the patronising familiarity with the Lord. That did not matter. Henley had hit the ideal that every man of peace should wish to be. Oh, to shake oneself free of suburbs, to catch the City train no more, no more bring home the skewered basket with the fish, but, sword in hand, stride slaughtering through a free, lascivious world, strike to the heart and feel the hot life spurt; to ride, to blow bugles, to consume all manner of things like a flame, “to go in a glory,” as the poet cried, “dead certain sure that we’re utterly bound to be right,” and otherwise to display all the dashing qualities that the Lord has granted as a heritage to the Blood! To the real man of peace, bored to extinction by his drudging occupations, such an appeal was irresistible. How from his nurseries he longed for the flashing sword-play to clear the world! :—

“ Fighting the brute,
The abysmal Fecundity ;
Checking the gross,
Multitudinous blunders,
The groping, the purblind
Excesses in service
Of the womb universal,
The absolute drudge.”

Another poet in different language had once before said what these banjo lines seem to be trying to say ; in the “ Two Noble Kinsmen ” the writer thus addresses War :—

“ O great corrector of enormous times,
Shaker of o'er-rank States, thou grand decider
Of dusty and old titles, that healst with blood
The earth when she is sick, and curest the world
Of the pleurisy of people.”

Such verses utter the very essence of peace. More than any pastoral they reveal the tedium of the town, and stir a restless atavism in the blood of bulging citizens, as even a tin trumpet may rouse old chargers in their stalls. That was Henley's great achievement. When the moment for action came, it was his spirit that sent many an incapable son of peace to sit upon the veldt. To mankind's infinite credit, it is boredom we most detest. In Central Africa two missionaries were struggling through the forest, hungry, ragged, and worn with disease. “ Cheer up ! ” said one to the other ; “ it's better than Hope Brothers.”

The issue by Mr David Nutt of Henley's complete works in verse and prose has recalled that outworn mood of years ago, when, as the poet said to England, “ your whelps wanted blooding.” It has reminded us, too, that, in spite of his shameless imitations and his struggles with obscurity of thought, in spite even of his sentimental delight in hugging his melancholy and other emotions to his heart, Henley was still a poet. The things that he wrote more than thirty years ago, before he began to breathe out slaughter and tell us that “ God in the Garden laughed outright ” —how excellent they sometimes were ! The Hospital poems live with the breath of a true passion. Sometimes there are words that catch a moment's true intensity :—

“ Ranged in mysterious disarray,
The Castle, menacing and austere,

Looms through the lingering last of day ;
And in the silver dusk you hear,
Reverberate from each crag and scar.
Bold bugles blowing points of war."

And, in spite of a reminiscence in the one poem that everybody knows, how bravely its verse runs :—

" In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed."

It was a boast, but a defiant boast that suffering justified, and by reason of that concentrated defiance it seems likely to pass winged among men for many years.

It was only when defiance turned to violence, and boasting bragged in continents, that the taint of unreality crept in and led to the bathos which is unreality's inevitable doom. It is true the master avoided the worst excesses of the young lions who soon began roaring to his bloodthirsty tunes. Above all, he escaped the worst error of his only dangerous rival for the mastership. Henley was never Recessional. He never implored the Lord's mercy on His people for having swallowed Naboth's vineyard. He did not whine to The Blood about a contrite and a humble heart, or cry to them, " Humble ye, my people, and be fearful in your mirth." But by his very personality in literature he helped to propagate those tricks of violence and unreal boasting that became such a plague in the days when guns coughed and generals barked and pens put on khaki. At the end he could not even go for a drive in Mr Alfred Harmsworth's motor without shouting, " Speed in the Lap of the Lord ! "

“ Speed on the Knees,
Speed in the Laugh,
Speed by the Gift,
Speed in the Trust of the Lord ! ”

“ Domine, dirige nos ” might serve well enough as motto for any motor, but it is merely violent thus to pile the piety up. And as to courage, perhaps it is best to take it for granted and say no more, lest our praise become a dubious tribute, like a certain well-known Order of Chastity. Nor is it necessary always to placard our love for England. We may love our country in other ways than by shouting pæans over the defeated, or wallowing in imaginary blood, and for a peaceful citizen to be constantly singing, “ Oh, let me like a soldier fall ! ” recalls the saying of Pope Pius IX. : “ Dr Pusey is like a bell always ringing, ringing to summon everyone to church, but never going in itself.”

That mood of Henley, the “ National Observer.” and Mr Kipling, is over now. It is impossible to refuse it sympathy, for it was a protest of the uncontrollable spirit of man against his confines. But reality killed it, just as in the old catch, “ War bringeth poverty, poverty peace.” For at no time was there any closer connection between its imaginings and the reality of war than in the tea-cup days there was between Windsor Forest and Arcadia.

L

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

THERE is a spirit of exile with which some men are born. Though they may not quit the few fields or streets of their birthplace, they dwell in perpetual banishment, and the yearning for their country is never still. They move about the common world as natives of a land which they have never seen with bodily eyes, but they feel for it the same desire as Ulysses felt when, in the midst of kings' palaces or the enchantments of a lovely witch, he longed always to see the smoke leaping up from Ithaca.

Such people are to be found among ourselves, though, as a rule, like newly-landed Jews, they try to conceal their alien patriotism by imitating the prevailing language and manner, sometimes with success. But in Ireland they have never been uncommon, and are freely recognised. They are often said to be "swept"—possessed by the fairy spirits that are heard in the wind and linger round the Druid stones and unrecorded burial places, always ready to woo away any beautiful youth or girl who may sleep there unawares, and to take their spirit back to its proper home. The Irish have even named this ancestral country of the soul, and given it a shifting place. It is in the West, under the sunset, like all things of longing; for, indeed, if Ireland herself had been set on the German Ocean side of England, with what different feelings her people would have regarded her!

And for a name they sometimes call it Tirnanog, the land of the young, and sometimes Hi Brazil—islands like the Greek Islands of the Blessed, where is the great Achilles. And, as is well known, these islands become visible from time to time at sunset, and then the people of Aran and Achill and the west coast push off their little boats, carrying fire ; for if once you could put fire on the islands they would stay, and man would live again in his spirit's home :—

“ Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity.”

William Blake dwelt in this, his native country, nearly all his waking life, and he sometimes used for it the symbol of Jerusalem, the city which he would build in England's green and pleasant land. Wordsworth visited it from time to time, like a child going for a joyful holiday to mountains or the sea. Shelley—but his worshippers have made such a fool of Shelley that we dare not speak of him. Mr Yeats is now the spirit in exile, and in many a poem and drama he has told of that Land of Heart's Desire, the Danaan land to which Niamh on a fairy horse bore the last of the Fenian Knights, the Innisfree of the soul, the Happy Townland which is the world's bane :—

“ The little fox he murmured,
‘ O what of the world's bane ? ’
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein ;
But the little red fox murmured,
‘ O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland,
That is the world's bane.’ ”

The sorrow of exile lies upon such spirits, for among the alien bitterness and disgusts of the world they know that their native country is still in existence, if only they could reach it. "If only they who lived in the Golden Age could die," says the Celtic Twilight, "we might be happy, for the sad voices would be still." "Far from my heavenly home," even English congregations sing on Sunday evenings before they go back to supper, and while they are singing, some of the people feel how bitter a thing it is to sit by the waters of Babylon. But I think that Mr Yeats himself is far happier than others in having an earthly home as well, to which he can turn the longings of an exile. Just as an Irish poet of Elizabeth's time so sang of the Black Rose, that the most treacherous English spy could not distinguish whether he sang of his lover or his country; and as Mangan sang of Ireland under the similitude of the Dark Rosaleen whose holy delicate white hands should girdle him with steel; so to Mr Yeats the exile's longing for the spirit's home is at times almost indistinguishably mingled with the symbolic rose of his country—"Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days." It is thus in his invocation "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," that he calls to the Red Rose to come near:—

"Come near, that no more blinded by moving fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way."

In Irish legend and history Mr Yeats has found the same kind of witchery, the same kind of symbolism for unreal and eternal things, as Rossetti and his attendant poets and painters sought in the legends and history of the Middle Ages. And he has endowed them with a finer vitality, because they belong to him more truly

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as his national heritage, and are further tinged with the sunset lights of exile and the crimson of indignation. "Know," he says, in the lines at the end of "The Rose"—

" Know, that I would accounted be,
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song ; "

Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because to him who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their meaning tell
Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
That God gives unto man in sleep."

One cannot tell how far Mr Yeats is right in attempting other themes than the enchantments of the Sidhe and the dim wisdoms old and deep. In his later essays he has told us his task now is to discover how he can make his work mean something to vigorous and simple men. And, again, he says he has turned from his faery lyrics to the drama, "in search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events, and for clear outline, instead of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vain regret." One cannot say. Ultimately, a great artist only works for himself, and he will take his own course. I would only remind him of what he says a wise woman in her trance once told him in symbolic words easy to understand—that his inspiration was from the moon, and that he should always live close to water. There is also that saying of his that poetry and romance can only be made by looking into the little, infinite, faltering, eternal flame that one calls oneself. And, again, "when one looks into the darkness there is always something there."

Even a collected edition does not mean the end of a true poet's work, and Mr Yeats is still in his best years. One cannot doubt that many new possibilities and great adventures lie before him—adventures, it may be, in the common world and the daily life that all men live. But, here, in these eight volumes of 1909, stands the poet Yeats we have known, the master of the magic world, the man who has lived upon "the phantom verge of things," the singer who could sing with the poignancy of a double exile. Here is the most "rapt" of modern poets, possessed also of an exquisite humour not uncommon in fairies, and tinged, as I said, by that deep crimson of indignation which is the inheritance of all Irishmen and of all exiles. Who but the Irish could make such a street ballad as that on their Transvaal Brigade, containing the lines :—

" Oh, mother of the wounded breast !
Oh, mother of the tears !
The sons you loved and trusted best,
Have grasped their battle spears."

And, as to exiles, let us remember that the Psalm, "Super flumina Babylonis," which begins with such profound tenderness of longing, ends with a supreme cry for vengeance : "O, daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and dasheth them against the stones." But one does not need to be in Babylon to know the wrath and longing of exiles. For there is a spirit of exile with which some men are born, and even in their own native country they do not escape the torment of its savage indignation.

LI

'THE GLEAM

IT may have been in reality or only in a picture that I once saw a vision of Hell receiving its New Year consignment of paving stones. Thousands of black demons were unloading and laying them down with much ado, and I noticed that on a large number of the slabs were inscribed the words of Merlin to the Young Mariner :—

“ After it, follow it,
Follow the gleam ! ”

So it is evident that the Gleam is very prominent in men's minds at the New Year, that, in hewing out their good intentions for the coming months, they, like true pavement artists, illuminate them with the familiar motto.

Certainly, it is impossible to choose a finer text for decorative purposes. We all admire the man who sees his Gleam clear ahead of him and follows it over wilderness and woodland, among the rolling of dragons and the cataract music of falling torrents, past silent rivers and through enchanted cities, onward into the valley of the shadow, till it hovers all but in Heaven. We admire and envy, for we recognise that this is quite the proper thing to do. Nor does it appear so very difficult. He for whom the Gleam shines as a guide must feel the solid assurance of the hymn beginning “ When I can read my title clear to mansions

in the skies." Confidence is easy where there is no further reason for doubt, and who would shrink from toil, privation, or danger, when a star leads him forward, with promise of glories yet to be revealed? "Whom thou dost not forsake, O Genius," sang Goethe in his youth, "into his heart no rain, no storm can breathe a fear. Whom thou dost not forsake, O Genius, confronting clouds of deluge and tempests of hail, he will sing as the lark high up in heaven."

It is all very enviable. We know there are men who have followed their star through poverty and danger and bitter persecution. We do not count among them Tennyson, who told of the Gleam, nor Goethe, who sang of Genius, for they were favoured by fortune from birth. But we remember Cervantes in his prison, Bunyan in his prison, Milton smitten by every curse of fate, Blake in his poverty, and even Burns, though people have said he sold his Gleam for a competency of gauging beer and tallow. We recognize such men as of fine nobility, and happy besides, no matter what disasters buffeted them. But there are not very many whose justification has been so conspicuous, and if we descend to a plane just below the highest, we may find ourselves faced with shrewd questions about that Gleam.

Take, for instance, the case of John Clare, once called the Peasant Poet by the half-dozen people in London who met him. If ever man followed his Gleam, John Clare did. Born a premature, wizened, and illegitimate imp in fenny gloom near Peterborough, he tended geese and sheep, he gardened for a lord, he ploughed badly, he wandered with gypsies, and lay out drunk at night, he lived equally in love and in debt, he starved in dirt, he produced seven children, he went mad, and spent the last twenty years of his life alone in

the Northampton madhouse. Yet two doctors signed his lunacy certificate on the ground of his having passed his years "addicted to poetical prosings," and in the asylum he produced his best work. Undoubtedly, through every fortune he followed the Gleam, and, perhaps, we may count him happy, for he was a better poet than peasant. He wrote a few verses of strange and personal beauty—innocency touched with a fond and lingering observation—as in the madhouse lyric, called "The Dying Child," which contains the characteristic lines :—

" His eyes glanced at the white-nosed bee ;
 He knew those children of the Spring ;
 When he was well and on the lea
 He held one in his hands to sing,
 Which filled his heart with glee."

We may count him happy in his following of the Gleam, and Mr Arthur Symons has collected some of his best work for a Clarendon Press edition. But in the introduction, the latest piece of Mr Symon's beautiful criticism, we read :—

" Clare's poetry begins by having something clogging in it ; substance, and poetical substance, is there, but the poetry has hardly worked its way out to freedom. That it should have got so far on the way there is one of the most astonishing things in literature."

Shall one follow the Gleam from fen to madhouse only to be an astonishment in the end, like a dog's dancing—"not well done, but the wonder is it should be done at all ?"

Or there is Clare's contemporary, Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymers, of whom Carlyle wrote in his zeal for labour :—

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“It used to be said that lions do not paint, that poor men do not write ; but the case is altering now. Here is a voice coming from the deep Cyclopiian forges, where Labour, in real soot and sweat, beats with his thousand hammers the red son of the furnace. . . . There are unhappy times in the world’s history, when he that is the least educated will chiefly have to say that he is the least perverted.”

It may be so. Certainly, the Corn Law Rhymer followed the Gleam among the furnaces of Sheffield, and perhaps we may count him happy, for a few of his sayings ring like beaten brass. Yet, in the last fifty years how many have looked at his works ? His vogue has long been limited, I believe, to the Cobden Club.

Take Joseph Skipsey, another contemporary—take the miner poet whose life and personality have been fondly recorded by his friend Dr Spence Watson. In the coal pits he, too, followed the Gleam and found a reward not to be despised. Yet how nearly the verdict of Burne-Jones on him agrees with the verdict of Mr Arthur Symonds on Clare, or of Dr Johnson on the dancing dog :—

“ Burne-Jones said the circumstances of Skipsey’s life had left him at a disadvantage in the art of writing poetry for which nothing could make up. He thought Skipsey must carry about with him the pain of knowing that all he did could only be judged after allowances made.”

The boy went to the pit at seven years old, and taught himself to read by the light of a miner’s gleam. Did all that heroic purpose end in carrying about with him the pain of that depressing knowledge ?

Yet another of their contemporaries died in Leicester late in 1908 at a good old age. Her name was Ruth Wills, poetess, and she also began to work at seven,

on eighteenpence a week. She learnt to read in a Sunday School, worked at hosiery in the same mill for sixty years, and was a regular contributor to the "Leicester Chronicle." We read in the local newspaper accounts that "she published two small volumes, called 'Lays of Lowly Life,' which had a circulation in the Midlands and are now forgotten. As a strong Nonconformist she also enjoyed the friendship of the late Dr Legge and Mr Allanson Picton, late M.P. for Leicester." To this end she followed the Gleam.

"Res angusta domi"—"Slow rises worth by poverty depressed"—the texts are worn very thin. But the real tragedy is, not that worth rises slowly, but that it is not so worthy to rise. I grant that the humble poets we have mentioned had a reward. They won an edition by Mr Arthur Symonds, an essay by Carlyle, a biography by Dr Spence Watson, or the friendship of the late Dr Legge. Two of them, at least, had a real touch of poetry and a power of showing it besides. But just because they were bred in poverty, they remained as dancing dogs in the ranks of literature, and the first thought in reading them is the wonder that it should be done at all.

And what shall we say of the thousands who do not get so far even as a dancing dog? In that same essay on the Corn Law Rhymer, Carlyle has the comfortable sentence: "Where a genius has been given, a possibility, a certainty of its growing is also given." The thought is characteristic of Carlyle's optimism, of his unshaken belief in the triumph of good; but it is profoundly untrue. The genius that wins distinction in the modern world is almost invariably sprung from the well-fed and well-educated classes. They have the monopoly of opportunity, though we need not suppose they have a monopoly of genius.

Over the heads of the million children now sitting in our Board Schools is there no beckoning Gleam? I have myself known boys among them who were born to be generals, explorers, mighty engineers, artists, or humourists. But what could Merlin say to them? Could he say: "After it, follow it, follow the Gleam!" when their mothers were waiting for their six shillings a week? Could he honestly say it when he knew that their very accent alone cut them off for ever from every chance of becoming generals, explorers, or any of the other distinguished persons which the Gleam lured them to become? In all the wastefulness of nature there is no such pitiful waste, but it is thus she lavishes away her riches by the hundred thousand a year, and to talk of following the Gleam is but a mockery.

Others there are beside who suffer more subtle frustration: spirits so fastidious as to hide themselves in commonplace lest they should degrade their high and secret calling; spirits of so tender a sympathy that the claim of pity or family or public service drags them irresistibly aside. One of the finest imaginative writers is now inditing Civil Service reports for fear of writing badly. One of the finest essayists devotes his passing years to a hopeless cause because he cannot endure the pity of it. Byron's Gleam was plain enough, but he won his highest honour by turning from it to fling away his life. Mr A. E. Housman teaches Latin, Mr Birrell is in the Cabinet. After all, it is not so easy as it seems to follow that Gleam whose motto annually illuminates the pavement of Hell.

LII

THE SCHOLAR'S MELANCHOLY

IN the diary that was found beside the body of Professor Churton Collins there were some sentences written that many scholars know the meaning of. They tell of a depression, not, indeed, continuous, but recurrent. "A wretched time, with occasional alleviation," is one entry. "Am now in dead, dull, suicidal misery" is another. A third says, "I thought I should have gone mad last night. Was so calm when I went to bed, and thanked God I was out of the wood, and felt perfectly well. Alas! morning came, and another fit of depression." Beside this nameless misery there are other more definite emotions—fear of future work, prayers for peace, longings for sympathy and affection, and, most significant of all, "an awful sensation of paralysis of will." Unselfish and kindly by nature, he always concealed this misery from the public gaze. Had he survived to unveil the statue at Lichfield, he would have delivered an inspiring address fit to send the Dean and Chapter hurrying back to turn up the dusty Boswells in their libraries. For more than twenty years how many audiences had he similarly inspired, to how many students opened the gates into the kingdom of literature! But it was a high price that he paid for their happiness as they entered those gates of promise. He was himself their ransom, and the scholar's melancholy had laid her clutch upon him as her due, leading him enslaved through

galleries of gloom to abysmal depths where the brief glimpses of vanishing peace only served to render the darkness visible.

It is difficult to realise that melancholy was once thought a benign and amiable power, compared to whom, as one poet said, there was nought on earth that was sweet. On only a little sterner lines a greater poet imagined her as the presiding deity of a scholar's life :—

“ Hail, thou goddess, sage and holy,
Hail, divinest melancholy.”

It would be incredible, if our grandfathers had not told us of their delicious melancholy as they marched under the standard of Byron's heart. But even before Milton's ode, melancholy's Anatomist had analysed all her forms as evil. Among them he had described “ study ” as a cause, explaining why the Muses are melancholy, and recommending various cures—by diet, exercise, pageants, shovel-board, simples, such as borage and bugloss, and precious stones, such as emerald and topaz to be either worn or taken inwardly. Such cures, of which spiders pounded in hellebore was one of the most efficacious, show the early recognition of melancholy's physical side. The dull misery and causeless fears may even in a scholar be alleviated by such means—by suggestion, by laying on of hands, and, in a word, by what is known as health. The difficulty in these cures is that when once melancholy has touched the scholar's hand, she leads him round a vicious circle, in which mind acts upon body, and body reacts upon mind, until the two are almost indistinguishable in their misery, being conjoined in an endless round, like a deadly serpent that has swallowed its own tail.

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If nature means the law of life, she has fixed her canon against intellect, and, to do him justice, man generally obeys her ruling. Hardly once a century does she allow her finest product of the brain to appear, and on most powers above a low average of mind she inflicts the penalties of the body. Here and there some scholar or man of letters may escape the toll of melancholy by his condition of life or by a peculiar bodily constitution. Scott escaped it till near the end, but he was an open air man, and his son attributed his fame to his power of being always the first to view a sitting hare. Gibbon escaped it entirely. With what envy, or, at least, with what marvel, a scholar must read the sentences of complacent self-satisfaction with which he concludes his autobiography :—

“When I contemplate the common lot of humanity,” he writes, “I must acknowledge that I have drawn a high prize in the lottery of life. . . . The first indispensable requisite of happiness is a clear conscience, unsullied by the reproach or remembrance of an unworthy action. . . . The love of study, a passion which derives fresh vigour from enjoyment, supplies each day, each hour, with a perpetual sense of independent and rational pleasure. . . . (I possess) the inestimable gift of the sound and peaceful slumber of infancy. . . . The enjoyments of society and situation would be tasteless or bitter if their possession were not assured by an unusual and adequate supply” (*i.e.*, income) . . . “My income is superior to my expense. . . . Since the failure of my first wishes I have never entertained any serious thoughts of a matrimonial connection. . . . Twenty happy years have been animated by the labour of my ‘History.’”

And then, as a final thanksgiving to fate and his own virtue, he adds the significant cause for satisfaction :
 “My nerves are not tremblingly alive.”

Blot those causes of satisfaction one after another

with the blackness of negatives, and you see the ordinary life of scholars. Endowed from birth with a beautiful lottery ticket that cannot win ; haunted as each year passes by the shadow of some new failure, the memory of some ancient crime—a breach of manners, an unintentional word, a single wounding phrase that everyone else has long forgotten, but that still makes the scholar flush with sudden shame ; weary of a life among the dead and the perpetual society of phantoms ; tortured by inexplicable fears and the spectres of all the lost opportunities of life, that crouch at the foot of his bed and make mouths at him from three o'clock till the grey horror of morning prepares him by an exhausting trance for another unendurable day ; dogged every hour by the squalid face of poverty and the terror that his children may not enjoy the advantages which have brought himself to this pass ; almost insane with a shy desire for affection, and himself a continual grief to the unhappy woman who has married him ; floundering in a bottomless slough of toil where there is little hope of influence and no assurance of praise ; his nerves all the time tremblingly alive, sensitive to the least touch as though his skin had been flayed and left them quivering to the shadow of every imagined slight, every whisper of depreciation, every error in himself, though perceptible to his eyes alone ; torn in pieces, besides, by a paralysis of will, an infinite faculty of hesitation, compared to which the Inquisition's rack was a benignant and merciful torture—such is the scholar's life, such the scholar's melancholy as we have come to know them now.

It is as though the paths of scholarship led but to the entrance of Virgil's hell, where grief and avenging conscience have made their lairs :—

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"Pale sickness dwells there, and the gloom of age,
Fear, and inexorable hunger, and drab want,
And death, and toil, and stupor so like death."

In that grim house are many cells, and not every soul is exposed to all the tortures at once. But time would fail me to call the roll of the noble and unhappy ghosts who have there found their abiding-places, or to draw distinctions between their stoic sorrows, their unappeasable longings, the sufferings of their pride, their cruel indignation, the long diseases of their lives, their invocations to the moon to cast her light for the last time upon their torment. "Feel!" answered Cowper on his deathbed; "I only feel unutterable despair!" "Like that tree," said Swift, "I shall die from the top." "Que vivre est difficile, O mon cœur fatigué!" was the last entry in Amiel's diary.

In the uncreative and profoundly self-conscious temperament of men like Amiel, the horror is, perhaps, seen at its worst. Isolated from the realities of life, and dreading, as he said, the contact of vulgarity in every form, he complained that he exhausted himself by trying to understand wisdom without practising it, by always making preparations for nothing, by living without living. There should be included in these sorrows the hopelessness of ever approaching the limits of the great sea of knowledge that surrounds us now—a hopelessness which Mark Pattison, himself so notable an example of the scholar's melancholy, regarded as its cause. And we must remember the further curse that Jaques added when he defined the scholar's melancholy as emulation. He may have meant the ravenous vanity by which the isolated, introspective man is so often consumed, or he may have meant the sorrow of imperfection, the impossi-

bility of ever realising in words those bright visions of thought that hang before the mind. In either case, another terror couches upon the threshold of the scholar's hell.

Boswell, who himself was tinged with the same kind of melancholy as we may imagine to have infected Faust's 'poodle, tells us that a Turkish lady (strange authority!) 'had taught him how happiness depends on the circulation of the blood. Johnson himself seems to have perceived the same truth when he recommended a course of rope-dancing for distressing thoughts, though, unhappily, he never took the cure in person. "Employment and hardships," he also justly said, "prevent melancholy. I suppose in all our army in America there was not one man who went mad"; for he always regarded even his own melancholy as a partial madness. It will be remembered that Goethe sought to banish his Harper's melancholy by a course of cabbage-gardening, and that Coleridge, in some of the most beautiful and melancholy lines ever written, laments, above all, that, in the midst of Nature's work, he remained the sole unbusy thing.

But the worst comes last, and there is one cause of the scholar's melancholy which no improvement of the circulation, no rope-dancing, no cabbage-gardening, or other activity can alleviate. It is the disbelief in the power of the word, the thought that the tongue of men and angels cannot touch the inveterate cruelty, the oppression and vulgarity of all this slow, insensate world. When wrath chokes the soul, and there is no sword to slay the slayer, no club to batter the brains of the fool, but hourly indignation boils itself away in an impotent vapour of words, then the scholar's misery is fulfilled, and from that futile woe there is no escape except only to the place where savage rage

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can tear his heart no more: *Ubi sæva indignitudo ulterius cor lacerare nequit.*

When those of us who stand outside the realm of scholarship turn for inspiration or peace to the words of scholars like Churton Collins, and of greater teachers than he, we might sometimes remember at how dear a price they have bought for us those consolations which we so easily and carelessly enjoy among the harsh and dusty conflicts of every day.

LIII

' THIS JOLLY WORLD

HERE comes the finest laughter ever laughed ! It comes with an entrancing whiff of roast pig, and a splash of red wine on its cheek, and in its hand a never-ending bun. And, see ! the man who leads it in, riding upon a monstrous frog, is the imaginative scholar, joint deity of sensitive intellectuals at the old Court Theatre, exquisite translator, for whom Euripides had been waiting twenty centuries. To the joy of an England that knows and cares nothing about Oxford's academics, Mr Gilbert Murray has entered upon the Professorship of Greek, and into those fastidious walls he leads this figure of immortal laughter, with a whiff of garlic round it, and the old red earth sticking to its leggings. The scene is one that Aristophanes himself might have laughed over ; but Oxford hardly shivers, remembering how even laughter grows decent with antiquity.

It was the " Frogs " that Mr Gilbert Murray brought with him to the Professorship, prompted, one might have supposed, by their fitness for the marsh of Christ Church meadows under autumnal rains. But the British frog, even in cultured Oxford, never reaches the sweet variety of the Greek frog's voice. It can say " Brekekekex," but it cannot say " Co-ax, co-ax ! " So there must be some other reason, and, perhaps, we find it in the name of Euripides printed on the left-hand pages of the translation. Is, then, the book only

done as a bit of criticism—just to bring in that poetic contest in hell, where the verses of one poet are weighed in lump against another's upon a critical balance that goes up and down like a grocer's scales? If that is so, Oxford can look forward to a fine time over the "Women on Law-and-Order Day," which ought to follow. But it will be a pity if the service of this most creative of translators to the cause of laughter is to stop there. How pleasant to see again in his gleaming versions the Jingo warriors, with their flaunting plumes and cheese rinds, the police court trial of the dog that stole the cheddar, the philosopher swinging in his balloon to abstract his thoughts from common earth, the peasant astride the dung-beetle knocking at the gate of heaven to ask if peace is there, the flights of birds chattering in their happy realm, the priest consecrating offerings into a little bag! And look! here come the women in revolt—Suffragettes, every woman of them—rushing the House in men's clothes, holding debates by lamplight, speaking from the Speaker's chair, boasting their Conservatism, voting for Socialism, enacting glorious revolutions, thundering the eloquence of common sense, denouncing silly war, clamorous for peace, inventors of the omnipotent boycott, beautiful and terrible as an army with banners!

And so we may enter into a sunlit land—the jolly world of man's eternal childhood, where the sky drops fatness and earth pours out her kindly fruits. There life is an immortality of cakes and wine. There pork chops frizzle on the grid, hares turn upon the spit, neat girls are boiling soup, the cuttle-fish fries in the onion that it loves, and eels are quiet at last, embedded in beetroot. It is the Feast of Pitchers, and the wine that spouted so mysteriously from berries springing out of stony ground and twisted stem now oozes in purple

through the jars. Out of doors a light wind blows across the sunshine, the figs are bursting with ripeness, the olives are turning dark, the corn stands red and heavy under passing clouds, and from the little woods and lakes come the pleasant notes of doves and partridges and quails and snipe and plovers and thrushes and finches and wheatears and widgeons and wild-duck and all things nice. There the sunburnt husbandman goes in and out, happy in his honourable toil and muddy clouts. His friends gather round him for enjoyment, solid, sensible, and silent ; unless there is a bit of a wedding on, and then, naturally, a man gives tongue. His wife spreads the table, a jolly creature, too, humouring the masculine pride, winning her will, shrewd in the ways of things, and alluring as a wine-cup. That was the good old stock from which sprang the bulldog breed of Trafalgar and Waterloo ! Ah, in those old days our countrymen were men indeed—big chested, broad shouldered, clear skinned, long of arm, and short of tongue—not like our modern degenerates, all tongue and a long vote !

But where are the boys of the grand old times :—

“ Good six-footers, solid of limb,
Well-born, well-bred, not ready to fly from obeying their
country's call,
Nor, in latter-day fashion, to loiter and lie, and keep their
consciences small ;
Their life was in shafts of ash and of elm, in bright plumes
fluttering wide,
In lance and greaves and corslet and helm, and hearts of seven-
fold hide ! ”

Yes, and there were writers in those good old days—
great writers whose swords were mightier than their
pens, whose words were half-battles—fine, sounding,
long battles beside, with no weak-kneed lucidity about

them. But now our youth has fallen into a green-sickness, a melancholy wasting. It worships Clouds instead of the friendly gods. It meditates pessimism and listens to what suicides say. Not one of them has the heart to drown in a butt of Malmsey, or roast a whole ox when the river is frozen over. But they nibble nuts like white mice, they talk of spinach chops, they dare not eat cheese for fear of hurting the mites, they suck a charcoal lozenge after meals, wash it all down with foaming goblets of hot water, and calculate the value of their "bodybuilding sustenance" in terms of calories.

And then the way they talk! They'd argue the hind leg off a dog to prove white is black and our only general a coward. They are always asking tiresome questions, too, and they show no respect for the hoary head and the Front Benches. And as to women! You might think the dear little god of love had died last year to hear them prate about their superwomen and termagant shrews and the crazy cats they stick on the stage and call their heroines! How has this sickly venom dribbled into our race? Does it come of free education or of cheap tea? Oh, before it is too late, let us purge from our system its corrupting kakogenics :—

" Dull, theoretical,
Faddist and doctrinaire,
Abstract, economist,
Ibsenish, Pragmatist,
Jaegerite-woolly-clad,
Cabbage-and-water-fed,
Stewed-in-George-Bernard-sauce,
Fabian rot ! "

Let us burn the Thinking Shop of Socrates and all these other Sophists, journalists, essayists, latter-day

dramatists, and follow our Master far beyond the low hills of Oxford to that dear Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, that never was on earth or sea, where Falstaff jests for ever beside his sack, and the Abbey of Thelema is always gay with gallant men and ladies no less gallant. There we will make Aristophanes our President of the Anti-Puritan League, and take our oath to observe the Thelemite rule of "Do what thou wilt," because, as its founder said, "men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct and spur that prompts them unto virtuous actions."

In that Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, where Bacchus is a jolly god, not maddening the brain nor distorting the form of man, we will lie beside the purple juice and think no more of wisdom's charcoal lozenges or of war's mouldy cheese. There we will celebrate the marriage of our President with the fair foreigner, young Oxonia of the West. For the wedding feast we will have pease broth, and red mullet, and some dozens of gammons, and dried neats' tongues, and goose pie with a foundation of blackcocks, and hares, and lambs, and octopus legs in garlic, and dried fruits, and honey-cakes, and sesame puddings, and mince pies, all flavoured with a shred of our President's verse. As for drink, the only philosophy we remember is the doctrine of Thales that all things are water, and so we will drink our wines out of sousing fire-buckets. And when the feast is over, we will revel in the hay and dance till midnight on the daisy field with ladies so proper and handsome, so miniard and dainty. For that was the way they had in the good old times, before wisdom and war came to vex the world. That was a way they had in the good old times, which nobody can deny.

So the eternal contest goes on. Here is the jolly world of field and food and fire, in which happiness is poured out like rain and sunshine for all to take their share without robbing a cat. And into the midst of its innocent revelry there stalks intruding that grey and hungry shadow of man's unsatisfied spirit, criticizing, questioning, disturbing, and tormented by infinite visions. There it stands, and as we pelt each other with grapes and figs, it keeps murmuring with tiresome persistence of man's unhappiness, and of the greatness from which his unhappiness springs. What an absurdity when it is so easy to be neither unhappy nor great, and there is so short a time for joy before we hear the frogs croaking like passing bells under the keel of old Charon's boat! But, with persistent questionings and reminders, that murmuring voice continues to sound in our hearts, summoning to uncomfortable enterprises and difficult roads, where all future chance whether of jollity or greatness may suddenly end; and yet we cannot choose but listen, for those are the paths that lead beyond the barriers of the world.

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